Dear distinguished representatives and colleagues,

On behalf of UN Women, I welcome you to this Workshop on measuring women’s representation in local government, and specifically on Sustainable Development Goal Indicator 5.5.1.b, ‘the proportion of seats held by women in local governments’

Personally, I am very delighted to be present amongst this high-level and distinguished representation from line-ministries, overseeing local governments, national statistics bodies and women machineries to discuss and work on transforming the SDG Indicator 5.5.1.b, which UN Women pushed to include, from tier III (an indicator that does not already have a standardized methodology for measurement and regional/global reporting) to tier II (an indicator with an agreed upon working definition and data collection methodologies. To this effect, I am excitedly looking forward to your rich and ample discussions and inputs to build on the findings of the UN Women led research on local government in articulating the foundations for this indicator’s methodology.

At UN Women we believe that women’s full, equal and effective participation and leadership at all levels of decision-making in the political and public spheres is the key to unlocking the transformational change towards ending discrimination and improving the quality of life in societies everywhere.

In spite of the strides made in systematically measuring and updating women’s political representation at the legislative and executive levels, which is easily and friendly accessible through the International Parliamentary Union (IPU) Website, measuring women’s public representation and participation at the local governments’ level remain an immense challenge, not just at the level of this region, but globally as well.

Having this data collection’s methodological challenge at hand, women’s representation and participation in the political and public arena remains incomplete and hence constitutes a fundamental knowledge gap, especially that the local government realm is considered a service-driven one that directly impact local communities and hence women’s participation in the decision
making at this level is socio-culturally welcomed\textsuperscript{1}. Closing this knowledge gap is not only needed to estimate the magnitude of women’s representation, but more importantly required to realize and appreciate the work of millions of local government women representatives, all over the world, who tirelessly and effortlessly thrive to improve their local communities, yet, unfortunately, at the moment, their work remain largely invisible. In addition, the lack of data collection methodology hinders comprehensive and periodic monitoring, which weakens the ability of Member States and other stakeholders to develop evidence-based policies.

On the bright side, the adoption of the \textit{2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development} – and its commitment to the principles of equality and non-discrimination – has \textbf{provided new impetus} to \textbf{scale up efforts} to close this gap once and for all. However, on the less bright side, time is very constrained and the need to monitor and report on the different SDGs’ indicators, including the 5.5.1.b is inevitable and inescapable. This challenge is, in my humble opinion, what distinguishes this workshop convening as it comes at a very critical, yet appropriate moment in time as on a \textbf{very focused level}, as mentioned earlier, the \textbf{purpose of this meeting} is to contribute to the further \textbf{development of the data collection methodology for this indicator}. Yet on a more general level, this meeting is considered a \textbf{meaningful step} towards \textbf{bringing} the millions of \textbf{invisible women} represented at the local government level \textbf{into the spotlight}.

With that, and \textbf{on behalf of the whole UN Women Team at HQ’s and the Regional Office of the Arab States}, I wish you a fruitful workshop, a one that will definitely move this work forward at the country level. I hope that by the end of tomorrow we will have concrete recommendations that can be implemented in each of the countries.

Thank you.

\textsuperscript{1} El Mahdy, S. And Women’s Marginalisation Still Exists, OFOQ for Research and Consultancies, 2013.