

**Deputy SRSG for Political Affairs Stephanie Williams' remarks for
the first meeting of the Women Support and Empowerment Unit
with International Community**

Tripoli, 04 February 2019

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

We are here today to celebrate a significant moment in the history of Libyan women. This first International Coordination meeting of the Women Support and Empowerment Unit – in spite of longstanding obstacles and challenges – marks the recognition by Libyan authorities of the critical role played by women to participate to state-building, development and peacemaking efforts across the country. It also publicly exemplifies the commitment of the authorities to take into account the specific experiences faced by women as they continue to endure suffering, marginalization and exclusion.

It took years for the Unit to be formally established. The seed was first planted when the 2015 Libyan Political Agreement emphasized the significant role of Libyan women in conflict prevention and peace-building. The document also stressed the importance of their equal participation in all efforts to resolve the Libyan crisis and to reflect the need to increase their role in decision-making and partaking in the political process. Its Preamble already provided for the establishment of the Unit. A presidential decree followed in 2016.

It took however the formidable tenacity of Libyan women, who relentlessly raised their voices, for the Unit to be operational. This dedication only exemplifies the role that Libyan women can and should play as a force for change. It only argues in favor of their full participation to political efforts. Among these women, I would like to recognize specifically Dr. Laila Ibrahim al-Lafi, the head of the Women Support and Empowerment Unit, and Ms. Hanna Abdul Qader al-Fakhakhi.

I am encouraged to see so many attending this meeting today. I would like to take this opportunity to urge all of you – Libyan counterparts, international representatives – to provide a longstanding support to the Unit. I cannot reiterate enough how ensuring women's participation to decision-making process is key to ensure political stability, security, economic development and social progress.

UNSMIL, at all levels, is committed to ensure the participation and inclusion of Libyan women in on-going political efforts. As you know, the

Mission is actively engaged with an extensive range of political actors and civil society representatives to advance the political process, through the organization of the National Conference. Its timing, location as well as identification of participants are closely linked to the outcomes that the Libyan people will want to achieve with the event. Already, I can guarantee that UNSMIL will ensure a strong participation of women, youth and representatives of the civil society. Together, we are working towards a historic settlement among. Women, as a positive force for change, will be critical in ensuring its success.

Thank you all for your attention and I hope that we will all be able to bring about the change that we desire towards stability of this dear, great country.

Thank you!