

## **2015 Is a Vital Year for Gender Equality**

**By Buya Jammeh**

At the Opening Session of the Commission on the Status of Women in March, U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, described 2015 as an important year for advancing gender equality. He added that “if the new development agenda is to be truly transformative, women must be at the forefront. If girls are held back, the whole world feels the pain” he added. The year 2015 is also the twentieth anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, a landmark in the struggle for women’s rights.

“The U.N. chief lamented the fact that women continue to suffer disproportionately from economic crises, the impact of climate change, and the displacement caused by conflicts and persecution. Given the continued cruelty and systematic attacks on girls and women by extremist groups, the UN Secretary-General believes that the international community must translate its outrage into action, demanding aid, services, support and justice.

“Attacking a woman or girl means attacking a possible peacekeeper, police officer, professional or prime minister. My unite to End Violence against Women campaign will continue to work to end all forms of violence against women and girls, including attacks in the home” he said.

Ban Ki-moon described women as agents of progress and change. When women are empowered, he said, they are the best drivers of growth, hope and reconciliation and buffers against the radicalization of youth and repetitive cycles of violence. He acknowledged the important advances for women and girls since the Beijing Conference, citing more access to education, the dwindling of maternal mortality rates and the leadership roles played by women in business, government and global organizations.

“At the same time,” he observed, “progress remains unacceptably slow and our gains are not irreversible. We must build on the Beijing foundation and complete our work. I challenge all stakeholders to work together to achieve gender equality during the time frame set by the new development agenda. Our goal must be: 50:50 by 2030,” he emphasized.

The U.N. Secretary-General commended member states’ determination to make this happen, noting that the U.N. system led by [the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women] UN-Women, will strongly support their efforts.

Ban K-moon concluded by calling on governments to work closely with women’s groups and organizations particularly the human rights defenders on the front lines.