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12th Annual Psychology Day

"The Time is Now: Psychological Contributions to Global Gender Equality"

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Opening remarks by

H.E. Ambassador Katalin Bogyay

Permanent Representative of Hungary to the United Nations in New York

Excellencies, Dear Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is with great honor and pleasure that I address this important event, and I would like to warmly thank the organisers – the Permanent Mission of Dominican Republic and of Palau, as well as our civil society partners - for gathering us to celebrate the International Day of Psychology, which is dedicated this year to our cherished colleague, the late Dr. Caleb Otto, Permanent Representative of Palau to the UN, who passed away not long ago. We all remember him with a warm heart.

Psychology is an often neglected science within the UN and international relations in general, although it is a science of fundamental importance, describing and explaining key factors that are at the heart of human behaviour – perception and cognition, reaction and interaction, which make psychology highly relevant for numerous aspects of our work. It informs us about basic trust and autonomy, stress and mental health, trauma and healing – these are all factors of success and failure, of violence and reconciliation, of love and hate. The immense wealth of knowledge of psychology has a tremendous potential in prevention and mediation, recovery and resilience-building, among many others.

There are numerous shining examples of how psychologists have contributed to international peace and human rights, and I am only mentioning two of them now.

One example is **Dr. Ervin Staub**, Professor Emeritus of Psychology at the University of Massachusetts, President of the International Society of Political Psychology as well as the Society for the Study of Peace, Conflict, and Violence. I am sure you are familiar with the work of the Hungarian-born Dr. Staub, who studied

how and why caring and altruistic behavior develops in children and adults, and also how and why individual behaviour and group dynamics lead to violent conflict and genocide. His contribution to prevention and reconciliation in Rwanda, Burundi and elsewhere is invaluable, and the Rwandan radio programme he and his team developed won the UN Human Rights and Accountability Award, and for his lifetime achievements, the "Award for life-long contributions to peace psychology" from the American Psychological Association (APA).

Another bright example I am bringing you today is Dr. **Mihály Csíkszentmihályi**, Distinguished Professor of Psychology and Management at Claremont Graduate University and legendary former head of psychology at the University of Chicago. Another Hungarian-born talent, Dr. Csíkszentmihályi is best known for recognising and naming the psychological concept of “flow”, a highly focused mental state of creativity and happiness. His discovery on the experience of flow influenced how we think about motivation, concentration and self-fulfillment at work and at play.

These outstanding examples show us how much psychology can open new levels of understanding of the human experience, and can assist in times of personal stress, regional crisis or international conflict situations – all these are core to our work here at the UN.

I, personally, have also been invested in psychology since many years during my professional life.

At the time I was Director General of the Hungarian Cultural Institute in London, we founded with film director Bernardo Bertolucci and the Freud Museum, the **European Psychoanalytic Film Festival** in 2001, and the festival has been

organised every year ever since. The Festival shows how arts and psychology are closely related to one another – both of them work on a subconscious level, as they capture and enable us to better understand ourselves and people around us. The festival is an important international forum bringing to the forefront the most excellent films in the field of psychoanalysis.

And finally, I would like to reflect on this year's topic of the international day, namely, how psychology can best serve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls?

Psychology works with the very foundations of our societies. It analyses our inner processes and personalities. It then uses these elements to analyse relationships – between women and men, within families and social groups. Psychology sees how social norms, attitudes, underlying cognitive processes impact personal power relations, starting from early child development, all through adolescence, adulthood and senior age.

Therefore, psychology can help us understand why women grow up to feel less worthy than men, and how parents can bring up their girls to be empowered and their boys to respect and value women. It enables women and girls to heal wounds of abuse and grow to be healthy and strong. And it also guides us in creating an enabling environment for women, for instance, by making workplaces that are safe, advertisements that are appropriate and public spaces that are inclusive for women and girls.

Ladies and gentlemen,

It has been proven that those societies that have lower rate of child abuse also have lower rate of violent conflict. With the power of psychology, we should start to build peace and gender equality from the seeds: from the mind and soul, from people to people, families, communities and society as a whole.

Thank you.