

Media Update

7 March 2019

United Nations

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

8 March 2019

Message by the Secretary- General

“Gender equality and women’s rights are fundamental to global progress on peace and security, human rights and sustainable development. We can only re-establish trust in institutions, rebuild global solidarity and reap the benefits of diverse perspectives by challenging historic injustices and promoting the rights and dignity of all.

In recent decades, we have seen remarkable progress on women’s rights and leadership in some areas. But these gains are far from complete or consistent – and they have already sparked a troubling backlash from an entrenched patriarchy.

Gender equality is fundamentally a question of power. We live in a male-dominated world with a male-dominated culture. Only when we see women’s rights as our common objective, a route to change that benefits everyone, will we begin to shift the balance.

Increasing the number of women decision-makers is fundamental. At the United Nations, I have made this a personal and urgent priority. We now have gender parity among those who lead our teams around the world, and the highest-ever numbers of women in senior management. We will continue to build on this progress.

But women still face major obstacles in accessing and exercising power. As the World Bank found, just six economies give women and men equal legal rights in areas that affect their work. And if current trends continue, it will take 170 years to close the economic gender gap.



Nationalist, populist and austerity agendas add to gender inequality with policies that curtail women's rights and cut social services. In some countries, while homicide rates overall are decreasing, femicide rates are rising. In others we see a rollback of legal protection against domestic violence or female genital mutilation. We know women's participation makes peace agreements more durable, but even governments that are vocal advocates fail to back their words with action. The use of sexual violence as a tactic in conflict continues to traumatize individuals and entire societies.

Against this backdrop, we need to redouble our efforts to protect and promote women's rights, dignity and leadership. We must not give ground that has been won over decades and we must push for wholesale, rapid and radical change.

This year's theme for International Women's Day, "*Think Equal, Build Smart, Innovate for Change*", addresses infrastructure, systems and frameworks that have been constructed largely in line with a male-defined culture. We need to find innovative ways of reimagining and rebuilding our world so that it works for everyone. Women decision-makers in areas like urban design, transport and public services can increase women's access, prevent harassment and violence, and improve everyone's quality of life.

This applies equally to the digital future that is already upon us. Innovation and technology reflect the people who make them. The underrepresentation and lack of retention of women in the fields of science, technology, engineering, mathematics and design should be a cause of concern to all.

Last month, in Ethiopia, I spent time with African Girls Can Code, an initiative that is helping to bridge the digital gender divide and train the tech leaders of tomorrow. I was delighted to see the energy and enthusiasm these girls brought to their projects. Programmes like this not only develop skills; they challenge stereotypes that limit girls' ambitions and dreams.

On this International Women's Day, let's make sure women and girls can shape the policies, services and infrastructure that impact all our lives. And let's support women and girls who are breaking down barriers to create a better world for everyone. "

António Guterres

Statement by Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, UN Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN Women

“Think Equal, Build Smart, Innovate for Change”

At a time when innovation is dominant, shaping and changing the way people live in every part of the world, we have to be intentional about its use to positively impact the lives of women and girls. That means making sure they are not only consumers of innovation, but take their place as innovators. With their engagement, both design and execution of solutions can address the unique needs of women and girls, from the creation of decent work to delivery of products, services and infrastructure for women in all walks of life. This year’s theme for International Women’s Day ‘Think Equal, Build Smart, Innovate for Change’ puts innovation at the centre of efforts to reflect the needs and viewpoints of women and girls and to resolve barriers to public services and opportunities.

Remoteness need no longer be an exclusion issue when mobile money technology and digital payments can deliver social benefits to even the most remote households. Lack of roads need not prevent life-saving medication from reaching patients, with smart inventions like 15-year old Nigerian [Eno Ekanem](#)’s drone to make drops to rural areas, controlled by SMS messaging.

Lack of electric light did not stop [Midwife Lorina Karway](#) from delivering babies at night in remote parts of Liberia; she improvised using her phone light. Now however, simple, low-cost solar lamps made by women have brought a creative, sustainable solution to Lorina, and to multiple health centres and individual homes that previously lacked access to energy infrastructure. This important invention that jumpstarts access to modern renewable energy can be further developed to be even easier to handle and use.

Women’s fresh, relevant thinking also brings transformative change to large-scale infrastructure, both virtual and physical. Our [Buy from Women Enterprise Platform](#) uses mobile technology to connect women farmers and cooperatives to information, finance and markets, optimizing the supply chain for women. The large ‘Senenergy’ solar-power project in Dakar, Senegal drew



on women's views in development, bringing shared benefits such as upgrades to the local school, the funding of a microcredit association to promote women's businesses in the local area, and premises for a maternity unit. Syrian architect Marwa al-Sabouni's award-winning vision for the redevelopment of the razed district of Baba Amr, Homs, includes ways to restore cooperation, social cohesion, and a sense of identity after the devastation of war.

Innovation and technology reflect their designers and makers. Knowing that algorithms increasingly determine selection and response, we need to react to the growing evidence that women have been routinely left out of the data on which decisions are made. "[Big data](#)" is only a reliable support for decision-making if it draws on a pool of unbiased information.

Groups that are under-represented and marginalized based on their race, ethnicity, sexual orientation or socio-economic status also need to have the opportunity to create and to provide feedback on what is created by others. This might be urban planning that designs for commuter or pedestrian safety with simple measures like better lighting and walkways that reflect crowdsourced data on hotspot attack or harassment zones. Or it could be toilet constructions that support women's period management needs. Or the use of biometrics as ID to replace formal registration documents that many women may not have or control. In any of these scenarios, innovation and technology with a gender perspective are crucial to remove barriers and accelerate progress for gender equality.

Our [Global Innovation Coalition for Change](#) brings representatives from the private sector, academia, and non-profit institutions to develop the innovation market so as to work better for women and to accelerate the achievement of gender equality and women's empowerment.

Women and girls must have opportunities to contribute to making real change, and help shape the policies, services and infrastructure that impact their lives. As we have seen from recent marches for climate action in Europe and elsewhere – they are ready to do so.

When we put the focus on those who are least heard, and least visible – whether individuals, or those hundreds of millions of informal sector workers who currently have little or no presence in official planning, or financial protection that will sustain them in ill-health, child care or older age - we are

tackling some of the deepest-reaching social problems and can make the progress we want to see.

Message from Ms Audrey Azoulay, Director-General of UNESCO

“Women in the Digital Space”

This year’s International Women’s Day, we celebrate women’s contributions to society – particularly in the digital space – and reflect on how we can ensure women fully enjoy their rights. Digital technologies are affecting the ways in which we work, learn, teach and live together. Unfortunately, women are not necessarily fully benefitting from this technological revolution. A recent report by the Broadband Commission, co-authored by UNESCO, concluded that the gender digital divide is actually increasing: in 2016, there were over 250 million fewer women online than men that year. Women are not only less connected, but benefit less from digital literacy and skills training, are less likely to be hired by tech companies, and often earn less than their male colleagues.

Even within some of the most cutting-edge fields of science – digital technologies and artificial intelligence – women are at a disadvantage. Only 22 per cent of artificial intelligence professionals are female, for example. This year, UNESCO seeks to redress the balance as we celebrate pioneering women who have pushed back the boundaries of our knowledge in fields such as quantum computing, digital innovation and artificial intelligence. By highlighting the successes of these women, we hope to encourage a new generation of young women in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields, where they remain under-represented. We work to encourage girls and women to take up STEM fields, and particularly to develop digital skills, for example through the recently launched “Girls Can Code” project.

In the cultural field, we also support women’s access to digital creation and we are promoting gender equality in the creative industries through the “You Are Next” initiative. In partnership with Sabrina Ho, UNESCO is equipping hundreds of young women from Mexico, Palestine, Senegal, Afghanistan and Tajikistan with the artistic, digital and entrepreneurial skills

needed to succeed in the digital environment. Despite such initiatives and many female role models in the digital sphere, women are increasingly removing themselves from online platforms to protect themselves from cyber-attacks and harassment. One in 10 women in the European Union report having experienced cyber-harassment since the age of 15, particularly among young women between 18 and 29 years of age.

UNESCO – as a United Nations agency dedicated to information and communication – is at the forefront of the fight against gender discrimination, deconstructing the stereotypes that spread through the media, as well as fighting harassment online. To contribute to tackling stereotypes, I invite you to join the global #Wiki4Women contributory movement. On Wikipedia pages only one biography out of six is currently devoted to a woman. By creating or completing biographies on extraordinary women in culture, education and the sciences on Wikipedia, UNESCO aims to give them the digital existence they deserve.

Building on last year's successful "edit-a-thon" at UNESCO Headquarters, UNESCO is once again collaborating with the Wikimedia Foundation, in organizing "edit a-thon" workshops in Cairo, Delhi, Bangkok, Lima and Almaty, as well as Paris. UNESCO is committed to making a positive and lasting contribution to women's empowerment and gender equality. Each one of us can make a difference, by rejecting bias and discrimination, ensuring that online spaces are safe for all, celebrating women's achievements and fostering women's contribution in the digital sphere, and all spheres of life.

About: International Women's Day

[International Women's Day](#) is celebrated in many countries around the world. It is a day when women are recognized for their achievements without regard to divisions, whether national, ethnic, linguistic, cultural, economic or political. International Women's Day first emerged from the activities of labour movements at the turn of the twentieth century in North America and across Europe.

Since those early years, International Women's Day has assumed a new global dimension for women in developed and developing countries alike. The growing international women's movement, which has been strengthened



by four global United Nations women's conferences, has helped make the commemoration a rallying point to build support for women's rights and participation in the political and economic arenas.

The UN and Gender Equality

The Charter of the United Nations, signed in 1945, was the first international agreement to affirm the principle of equality between women and men. Since then, the UN has helped create a historic legacy of internationally-agreed strategies, standards, programmes and goals to advance the status of women worldwide.

Over the years, the UN and its technical agencies have promoted the participation of women as equal partners with men in achieving sustainable development, peace, security, and full respect for human rights. The empowerment of women continues to be a central feature of the UN's efforts to address social, economic and political challenges across the globe

"خواتین کا عالمی دن" "8 مارچ"

اقوام متحدہ نے طے شدہ عالمی منصوبوں، معیارات، پروگرام اور اہداف کو تاریخی سطح پر دنیا بھر میں خواتین کے معیار زندگی کو بہتر بنانے میں مدد فراہم کی ہے۔ خواتین کا عالمی دن خواتین کی کامیابیوں کو اجاگر کرتا ہے، خواتین کے لیے مواقع پیدا کرنے اور ان کی غیر استعمال صلاحیت کی حوصلہ افزائی اور خواتین کے خلاف تشدد کو ختم کرنے کی وکالت کرتا ہے۔ ممبر ممالک کو اس دن کو خواتین کے حقوق پر مذاکرات، تقاریر اور دیگر اجتماعات کے ذریعے منانے کی دعوت دی جاتی ہے۔ اقوام متحدہ کی جانب سے یہ دن 1975 سے منایا جا رہا ہے۔

<http://youtube.com/watch?v=ldyvIcVR9JI>

<http://www.un.org/en/events/womensday>
