

## **THE SECRETARY-GENERAL**

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### **MESSAGE ON INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY 2019**

**New York, 8 March 2019**

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.

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Also is the video message link below:

<https://s3.amazonaws.com/downloads2.unmultimedia.org/public/video/ondemand/MSG%20SG%20INT'L%20WOMEN'S%20DAY%208%20MAR%202019%20%20EN.mp4>