



THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

2 September 2020

Dear Colleagues,

I write to update you on our efforts to reach gender parity across the United Nations – a goal that reflects the core values set out in the Charter and my own vision for the Organization. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted once again that gender equality is a prerequisite for resilient, just and equitable societies. The United Nations workforce must model these values both for our own effectiveness and for our credibility in the eyes of the people we serve.

It was with this in mind that, shortly after taking office, I launched the United Nations System-wide Strategy on Gender Parity. Nearly four years into this effort, I can report that we have come a long way. In 2019, for the first time in United Nations history, we reached parity in the Senior Management Group and among Resident Coordinators. On 1 January 2020, and well ahead of schedule, we attained this milestone by reaching parity among all full-time senior leaders, comprising 90 women and 90 men at the level of Assistant and Under-Secretaries-General.

This is not just a question of numbers; it concerns fundamental changes to our organizational culture. Women bring different skills, perspectives and experiences to their roles. No area of expertise or leadership position should be the exclusive domain of one gender. I am encouraged that as a result of our deliberate efforts, women have taken the helm of United Nations offices and roles that were formerly filled only by men. We need to draw on the talents of all, for the benefit of all, in all dimensions of our work.

In addition to the commitment to reach parity and diversify in our senior leadership by 2021, I have committed to achieving parity at all levels of the Organization by 2028. We are on track to meet this target, but progress is uneven and inconsistent. Our greatest challenge is in field missions, where the gap is the largest and the rate of change is slowest.

In order to address the shortfalls in the field and several broader policy issues, I established a Working Group on Emergency Measures that is working on various initiatives aimed at overcoming the remaining obstacles we face as quickly as possible. We have now updated the relevant administrative instruction to support our ambition and align it with current staff selection policies. I am confident that this instruction will help us turn the tide.

All United Nations Staff Members

The Administrative Instruction on “Temporary Special Measures for the Achievement of Gender Parity” ([ST/AI/2020/5](#)), sets forth temporary special measures that apply to selections and appointments where gender parity has not been reached within the entity at the level of the recruitment. In such cases, entities will attempt to identify qualified female candidates from within and outside the Organization, prior to posting job openings. Whenever the entity is selecting a candidate to fill a job opening from: (i) a list of candidates endorsed by a central review body; (ii) a competitive examination roster; or (iii) a list of rostered candidates who applied for a job opening, the job opening shall be filled by a female candidate provided that she meets the requirements for the position and that her qualifications are substantially equal or superior to those of the male candidates.

The temporary special measures set out under [ST/AI/2020/5](#) apply across the United Nations Secretariat, including in peace operations and political missions, including during the establishment of a new entity; when the staffing of existing entities is expanded; during periods of downsizing; when a recruitment freeze is in effect or when an entity is being reorganized.


For many years now, the General Assembly has requested that the Organization achieve 50/50 gender parity at all levels, recalling Articles 8 and 101 of the Charter of the United Nations. The original hope was to achieve this goal by 2000 – a generation ago. Today, we must continue to expedite our work, and I believe these temporary special measures will have a catalytic impact on our success rate in the most challenging areas for years to come.

As we pursue parity, we are also taking steps to ensure equitable geographical representation. This is another type of diversity and inclusion that the United Nations must embody. Furthermore, the use of temporary special measures is a human rights tool aimed at achieving equal participation and representation of women across the board, and in all aspects of society. Making greater use of this tool is one of my priorities in taking forward gender equality and the equal rights of women under my [Call to Action for Human Rights](#).

As we commemorate the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations at a time of immense and urgent global challenges, let us continue working together to take ambitious steps towards greater diversity and inclusion. Thank you for your commitment to this cause, which is crucial to the fate of our world and to the future of our Organization.

Yours sincerely,

with my warmest personal regards



António Guterres