



THE SECRETARY-GENERAL: H. E. Antonio Guterres  
WRITTEN MESSAGE ON INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY  
New York, 8 March 2017

Women's rights are human rights. But in these troubled times, as our world becomes more unpredictable and chaotic, the rights of women and girls are being reduced, restricted and reversed.

Empowering women and girls is the only way to protect their rights and make sure they can realize their full potential.

Historic imbalances in power relations between men and women, exacerbated by growing inequalities within and between societies and countries, are leading to greater discrimination against women and girls. Around the world, tradition, cultural values and religion are being misused to curtail women's rights, to entrench sexism and defend misogynistic practices.

Women's legal rights, which have never been equal to men's on any continent, are being eroded further. Women's rights over their own bodies are questioned and undermined. Women are routinely targeted for intimidation and harassment in cyberspace and in real life. In the

worst cases, extremists and terrorists build their ideologies around the subjugation of women and girls and single them out for sexual and gender-based violence, forced marriage and virtual enslavement.

Despite some improvements, leadership positions across the board are still held by men, and the economic gender gap is widening, thanks to outdated attitudes and entrenched male chauvinism. We must change this, by empowering women at all levels, enabling their voices to be heard and giving them control over their own lives and over the future of our world.

Denying the rights of women and girls is not only wrong in itself; it has a serious social and economic impact that holds us all back. Gender equality has a transformative effect that is essential to fully functioning communities, societies and economies.

Women's access to education and health services has benefits for their families and communities that extend to future generations. An extra year in school can add up to 25 per cent to a girl's future income.

When women participate fully in the labour force, it creates opportunities and generates growth. Closing the gender gap in employment could add \$12 trillion to global GDP by 2025. Increasing the proportion of women in public institutions makes them more

representative, increases innovation, improves decision-making and benefits whole societies.

Gender equality is central to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the global plan agreed by leaders of all countries to meet the challenges we face. Sustainable Development Goal 5 calls specifically for gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls, and this is central to the achievement of all the 17 SDGs.

I am committed to increasing women's participation in our peace and security work. Women negotiators increase the chances of sustainable peace, and women peacekeepers decrease the chances of sexual exploitation and abuse.

Within the UN, I am establishing a clear road map with benchmarks to achieve gender parity across the system, so that our Organization truly represents the people we serve. Previous targets have not been met. Now we must move from ambition to action.

On International Women's Day, let us all pledge to do everything we can to overcome entrenched prejudice, support engagement and activism, and promote gender equality and women's empowerment.

This ends the UN Secretary General's message. Permit me now to share some reflections for the Myanmar context.

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Your Excellency,

Distinguished guests, Colleagues

On this International Women's Day on the 8th March 2017, women, men and societies are called to "Be Bold For Change" to make the world a more gender inclusive world under this year's theme of "Women in the Changing World of Work: Planet 50:50 by 2030". Gender equality and Women's Empowerment are a change that does not come at the cost of others. The end result of change is not a zero-sum gain, but a win-win situation for women, for communities and ultimately for society. Advocating for gender equality and women's empowerment is part of social reform and it gets to the heart and soul of societal change.

If women and girls are healthy, safe and provided with opportunities that will enable them to live to their full potential, then they can contribute to the growth and socio-economic development of the country. For years, women in Myanmar have borne the brunt of the consequences of inter-communal tension and conflict. They are therefore well placed, experienced and equipped to be the mainstay for peace and reconciliation and deserve full and equal participation in society, government, reform and in the peace process.

The 2014 census data has unearthed a treasure trove of potential and opportunity for women in Myanmar. Only half of women are in the work force as compared to 85% of men. If more women entered the work force, there would be a dramatic rise in the country's per capita income. By realizing the potential of women and enabling greater participation in the labour market, Myanmar can generate its very own brand of economic growth driven by a gender dividend. Women are critical to Myanmar's development. They need to be brought into the economic sphere, and they need to be part of deciding how this will become a reality. It is time for women to come out of the slipstream and into the mainstream.

On another front, the UN recognises that Myanmar has a solid national strategic plan for the advancement of women. I congratulate DSW (in the Ministry of Social Welfare and Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement) for having recently revitalised the Myanmar National Committee on Women Affairs. There is now high expectation for this inter-sectoral apex body to exercise its oversight role in monitoring NSPAW's implementation across government sectors. We urge that the Government invests quickly in strengthening the capacities in the different sectors to integrate gender into all ministry plans and actions. This is a priority so that gender equality is properly understood and women's empowerment is recognised as a potential propelling force

for Myanmar's advancement, benefiting all persons, specially the vulnerable and the marginalised.

In the same way, aid coordination on gender equality and women's empowerment needs to be strengthened and be more consistent now that gender funding is increasing and more donors are supporting the NSPAW.

Finally, I congratulate DSW's plans for efforts to end discrimination and violence against women and girls and I urge its quick response to the CEDAW recommendations. When women and girls live in fear of discrimination or violence, gender equality and women's empowerment are not possible and it is society that loses out.

Excellency

The UN continues to be committed to supporting and assisting Government on a wide range of interventions aimed at accelerating efforts to bring about gender equality and women empowerment in Myanmar.

Jezu Tin Bah Deh