
Statement of

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Women Staff Council Chair

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Board

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Mr. President,

Distinguished Members of the Executive Board,

Dear Colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to address you today as the Chair of the UNDP, UNFPA, UNOPS and UN Women Staff Council.

*Please allow me to start by expressing my deepest sympathy and condolences to colleagues and families that have lost their loved ones as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.
Thank you.*

This Council, together with about **80 country and regional level staff associations**, is fully committed to a strong UNDP, UNFPA, UNOPS and UN Women and to the rights, dignity and wellbeing of **all our constituents -- staff and non-staff**.

2020 was and continues to be a very difficult year. Each one of us struggles with the new reality that the COVID-19 pandemic has brought. The sense of belonging to **One UN** and the need to jointly respond to the unprecedented situation

caused by the pandemic, has brought our senior management and Staff Representatives together to act in unison for the well-being of all. We appreciate the joint successes we have had in responding to the challenges of the pandemic and to the natural and human-made disasters we have been confronted with. To us, our response demonstrated our shared values and capacity to come together to meet the needs of our constituents and build a strong, safe, stable and relevant United Nations.

Mr. President,

*I wish to express our appreciation and gratitude to the senior management of UN Women for their timely and sensitive response to the COVID-19 pandemic and for making the well-being of UN Women personnel **THE** priority in this time of crisis.*

UN Women's **rich, diverse and dedicated human capital** showed exceptional professionalism and dedication to delivering for women and girls at this difficult time. Everyone has stepped up to help the process of balancing expectations to deliver while addressing the new social, organizational and individual challenges we are faced with.

We are successfully implementing the 2030 Agenda and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action while recovering at the same time. However, every office and every one of us is deeply affected by the situation. The stress and the uncertainty of these times has **resulted in a growing number of mental health issues.**

Telecommuting and teleworking were new and challenging ways of working for many. We moved to remote working within a short period of time and colleagues have appreciated that they could continue working. UN Women supports flexible work arrangements and has regularly provided updated information on a wide range of issues of concerns to colleagues and led a rigorous process of preparing for return to the office. UN Women Staff Representatives have participated fully in a number of internal working groups. For colleagues with children, the amount of time dedicated to care work has increased significantly, stretching the boundaries between work and non-work time. Senior management has tried to support colleagues with care responsibilities and this is important and necessary as we need to be the model for the system and beyond in taking a gender-responsive approach to the crisis response. Depression, suicidal thoughts, feeling isolated and losing sleep are only some of the emotions colleagues have expressed. Domestic violence has increased. A Pulse Survey conducted for colleagues in NYC showed that

while colleagues felt safe and privileged during the first months of the pandemic and were grateful for management's efforts to minimize the impacts, the majority expressed their **concerns about work/life balance and fears about the return to the office under safe conditions.**

Also, in the past few months, following the murder of George Floyd, the world has seen an inspiring mass movement emerge against racism. As the Secretary-General himself has acknowledged, the United Nations is not immune to the scourge of racism. He has stated that we “have not paid enough attention to...the specific question of racist bias and racist discrimination” and has called for an “honest conversation on racism”. Racism has no place in the United Nations and together we have work to do to eradicate it once and for all.

Further actions are needed to mitigate the negative effects of these developments and eliminate sources of stress. Only solutions developed jointly will secure the trust of all personnel in the future. These must include the following:

Building truly inclusive workplaces requires a long-term approach and is everyone's responsibility. We pride ourselves on the diversity of our workforce, but we have not lived up to the principles laid out in the UN Charter.

Eradicating racism will not be addressed by short term fixes but culture change and **no one should fear retaliation** for speaking up. The importance of **skilled leadership** at all levels to deal with the situation and to support individuals and teams is crucial. We welcome the commitment of UN Women's senior management to culture change to ensure dignity and respect for all. Another facet of anti-racism work must address biased **recruitment processes**, which are often described by our constituents as not providing equal opportunities to all - ageism, skewed North-South geographical representation in HQ, and inadequate representation of persons with disabilities and LGBTQI persons, - are the issues most often raised. On redressing the imbalance in North South representation at all levels of UN Women, we count on the support and commitment of our donor community to help us achieve this goal by funding work, not posts for their nationals.

Harmonization of contract modalities in the UN and in our agencies. We represent staff and personnel from UN Women, UNDP, UNFPA and UNOPS in the UNISERV Federation and we share the Secretariat Staff Union's concerns about the lack of a "One UN" approach in staff and personnel contracts. COVID 19 represents an unprecedented humanitarian crisis. We are witnessing a very successful One

UN response to the crisis and at the same time we face **challenges in applying the principles of Duty of Care to all – staff and “non-staff”** – all of whom need to be taken care of. We recognize the challenge of **attracting and retaining talent** when there is a persistent **imbalance of core and non-core resources**. However, we would like to reinforce our earlier statement that retaining talent will be possible if they are offered a contractual modality that will motivate them to join, remain, participate fully and feel safe in the organization. Member States and the United Nations need to lead by example and should advocate for **equal job opportunities**. **We need and will greatly appreciate the Board’s support in ensuring this happens**. The pandemic has laid bare the differences between national and international staff and staff and “non-staff” contractual modalities, entitlements and benefits. It has exposed the vulnerabilities of various categories of personnel and the increased their fears. Fear for the future as expressed by our colleagues is directly linked to their contracts and a “foreseen future” that for many will mean no after-work entitlement and benefits. There are also justifiable concerns about the future of the UN Pension Fund. Moving forward, **we urge for harmonization of contract modalities in the UN and in our agencies** and a unified approach in respect to the ICSC modalities, which will also support **interagency mobility** – we recommend starting with

offering continuing appointment to eligible staff and FTAs up to 5 years where appropriate. In the meantime, we welcome UN Women's efforts to address the issue of the improper use of service contracts and consulting modalities by improving the conditions of each and filling some existing gaps: the new UN Women internship policy that introduced paid internships is an excellent example of this. We continue being concerned for national staff in conditions of crisis when the devaluation of local currencies results in lowering the value of their salaries. This must change as well and we count on your support in this.

Recognizing performance and promotion - Personnel work hard remotely, in isolation, often in hardship conditions, sometimes without electricity and access to the internet. The challenges of the new ways of working imposed by the crisis effectively exposed the hierarchy of individual needs. The need for belonging becomes more important for many colleagues. We all know that “recognition is the greatest motivator”, and that it results in self-actualization and a deepening sense of responsibility and creativity. It often costs nothing. We are yet to reevaluate how we **recognize our personnel** to inspire performance and retain top talent. This is also important work that needs to be prioritised.

Change management process - The Council respects the need for organizational changes and we recognize that UN Women responded creatively to the UN reforms in fast changing operational and programme contexts. Transparency, fairness, participatory and inclusive processes and consistent and clear communication of vision are key to ensuring successful change management processes. We ask that the Staff Council be engaged in the implementation and rollout of the changes and any evolution of the same – this is especially important in these times of crisis.

To conclude

The pandemic has changed the ways we work and will affect us all for a long time going forward. We must all recognize the concerns and fears about the future of the organization, and we would like to remind all that **“the best way to predict your future is to create it”**. As we are returning or planning to return to our offices - we shall bring together our good pre-COVID and newly gained practices. We would like to thank each member of our constituency for their extraordinary commitment and passion for UN Women’s work and helping to imagine and develop a “new way of working”. Looking ahead, we count on your support to ensuring the rights and well-being of all personnel, including by providing adequate funding to meet those needs.

Mr. President, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to address the Executive Board

I look forward to your feedback and comments.

Thank you.