

Statement by members of the Women's Major Group on the appointment of the new Secretary General of the United Nations



Thursday 13 October 2016

The Women's Major Group of the UN Agenda-2030 process (WMG), has received the announcement of the nomination of Mr Antonio Guterres as new Secretary General, with **mixed feelings**.

Over the past year, the **WMG has advocated for the election of a feminist, woman Secretary General**. After 70 years of male leadership of the United Nations, it is past time for a woman to take the helm. Women are half of the world's population and have the right to equal representation in decision-making and leadership at the highest levels. The UN is officially committed to gender parity. It must lead by example by putting women in leadership positions. Instead, it has chosen nine men in succession for the post of Secretary General. Mr Guterres is also the fourth European man to take this position.

The election of Mr Guterres gives us reason for cautious optimism. Mr Guterres has demonstrated his commitment to human rights when he helped his country move out from of the tragic dictatorship of Salazar and through his leadership of the United Nations High Commission on Refugees. His commitment to ending poverty, addressing the needs of the most marginalized communities, preventing conflict, and willingness to challenge powerful countries has garnered him deep respect from government and civil society alike.

In his speech to the General Assembly (12 April), Mr Guterres promised that, were he elected, he would change the discourse from 'women and girls being subject of discussion to being empowered' to change the course of their lives. We appreciate Mr. Guterres' stated commitment to gender equality, but we are deeply concerned that his track record on women's human rights may not match his rhetoric. In particular, we are alarmed by his veto of a law to legalize access to safe abortion services as Prime Minister of Portugal, which is a key aspect of women's and girls' sexual and reproductive rights and a prerequisite for gender equality and empowerment. As Secretary General, Mr. Guterres must not allow his personal, religious beliefs to trump the realization of women's human rights in their entirety, including their **sexual and reproductive rights**.

The Women's Major Group therefore calls on Mr Guterres to take a strong stance on realizing **human rights and justice for of all peoples** including women, indigenous peoples, people of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities, people with disabilities, people living with HIV migrants and refugees, racial and ethnic minorities, and other marginalized and excluded people, from the very start of his term.

We call on Mr Guterres to lead, with conviction, a moral push for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in a way that is **progressive and a radically transformative, human rights-driven**, well-resourced and universal.

We urge Mr. Guterres to ensure a powerful and **vociferous UN engagement in the conflict prevention and the peaceful resolution of conflicts** and to advance UN 1325 and the Women, Peace and Security agenda. This should build on and take to the next level his

leadership to ensure gender, age, and diversity mainstreaming as part of UNHCR's standard refugee response measures; to develop concrete measures such as SGBV guidelines for refugees, returnees, and IDPs; and to champion S/GBV protection and response in humanitarian settings. It should also strengthen action for gender equitable conflict prevention as a key priority for UN action at every level, including through demilitarisation, disarmament, and strong and effective financing for gender equality and gender equitable long-term peace.

We call on Guterres to continue to stand strong on voicing - and fulfilling - the human rights of migrants, internally displaced people (IDP) and refugees and lead the UN to take action that goes beyond the recently adopted New York Declaration on Refugees and Migrants. Half of all IDP and refugee populations are children; a significant proportion are women. Most belong to groups who are systemically socially excluded and persecuted – because of their ethnicity, caste, faith, sexual orientation, or because they are poor, working marginal lands or with coveted resources. In particular, Guterres must lead the UN to take urgent action to address the **interrelated systemic financial, economic, energy and climate crises**, combined with conflict, the rise of fundamentalisms and religious extremisms, which have contributed to the displacement of 65 million people.

We call on Guterres to take strong actions to challenge the shrinking space for civil society and the attacks by governments and others on civil society organizations, social and environmental activists, **women's human rights activists and human rights defenders**. As SG, Guterres must take decisive steps to enlarge spaces for actors who are critical of government policies, who protest and denounces human rights violations, and who champion social, economic, gender and environmental justice.

We call on the new SG to **bring more women into the decision making at the** as well as in departments, funds, programmes and specialised agencies. There must be balanced representation of women and men in every part of the UN system including in positions of senior leadership.

The WMG calls for Guterres to commit to **a timeline for achieving gender parity in leadership at all levels within the UN.**

Finally, we urge member states to commit to **transparent and participatory processes for the election of the UN Secretary General and the heads of key UN Agencies**, in which all actors can express their positions, ultimately leading to election by the 7 billion people of the world. The open sessions during this election process were a good start that can be built upon for the future. We furthermore call on the Secretary General to work with member states to start improving the political procedures for selection of new Secretary Generals, and to add to the regional rotation criteria and commitment to human rights, a new **criteria of gender parity** in line with the UN mandate.

The next set of candidates for the post of Secretary General should comprise only women. They further must demonstrably have leadership as champions of gender equality and a feminist agenda. As a first step and good start we call on Guterres to appoint a **woman from the global South with a track record in advocating for gender equality as Deputy Secretary General that will be a real and equal partner in the leadership of the UN.**

We look forward to working with the Mr Guterres in the coming years on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, the women's rights agenda and a democratic – feminist – UN reform.

With our best regards,
OPs of WMG (based on the input and views of members of the Women's Major Group)
www.womenmajorgroup.org

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WFP Priscilla Achakpa is the WMG Africa Organizing Partner and the Executive Director of Women Environmental Programme (WEP) Nigeria, an NGO founded by a group of grassroots women in Nigeria that addresses the gender injustices on issues relating to environment, economic and social rights of women, children and youths in the society.



WFP Isis Alvarez is a WMG Global Organizing Partner and the Gender Advisor and Campaigner for the Global Forest Coalition (GFC), which aims to reduce poverty of Indigenous Peoples and other forest-dependent peoples by advocating for their rights as a basis for policy and addressing deforestation.



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WFP Kate Lappin is the WMG Asia & Pacific Organizing Partner and the Regional Coordinator for the Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law & Development (APWLD), a network of 183 feminist member organizations and women committed to promote women's human rights and use law as an instrument of social transformation.

