

## 'Power is not given, power is taken', UN chief tells women activists, urging push-back against status quo

"The central question of gender equality is a question of power", he stressed, noting that we continue to live in a male-dominated world with a male-dominated culture.

"Power is not given, power is taken", he stressed, adding that "we have to push back" against the resistance to change "because people do not like power being taken".

[Secretary-General António Guterres](#) (centre) holds townhall meeting in connection with the sixty-second session of the Commission on the Status of Women., by UN Photo/Mark Garten

"We will only be successful if we are able to combine the institutional approaches, like the ones the UN develops, with the approaches at the civil society [level], the grassroots movements and the public opinion in general", he elaborated.

In enumerating the UN's internal priorities, he listed the first as parity, telling the meeting that at the senior Under-Secretary-General (USG) and Assistant-Secretary-General (ASG) levels, "we are now at 53 per cent men and 47 per cent women, which means that we are in line to the commitment I made to reach full parity in senior management in 2021", he stated.

He added that while there are 26 women and 16 men in senior management, peacekeeping remains a male-dominated field. "We need to have probably a majority of women in headquarters" at the USG and ASG level, he said, "to compensate for what is still a minority in the field, but we are making progress very quickly", he explained.

Notwithstanding the progress at the top levels, where he can personally appoint women, he said he was aware of a "pushback" moving down the ranks. To remedy this, Mr. Guterres said he was encouraging all Member States to include gender as a criteria and vowed to keep pushing, adding that "the battle is enormous".

### ***Ending impunity***

Turning to sexual harassment, he flagged that the victims are predominantly women and girls "because of the power relations".

The Secretary-General said the main obstacle to introducing a zero-tolerance policy was the doubt people had over its effectiveness, pointing out that often "the victim becomes a double victim" instead of the perpetrators being punished.

To combat this, “we have done something revolutionary” he told the group: “We created a team of six women experts on sexual harassment investigations” where complaints bypass the old bureaucratic system and go straight to this team, “which might make some men think twice”. This second priority was greeted with a stirring round of applause.

Sexual exploitation perpetrated by UN staff against others, namely vulnerable populations, was the UN chief’s third priority.

While cases are reported in peacekeeping operations, they also come in from agencies working in humanitarian and development fields.

“It is important to have a prevention capacity and at the same time a solid capacity to fighting impunity”, he asserted, adding that progress is being made. Specifically he said the overwhelming majority of troop and police contributing countries “are signing a contract with us in relation to prevention, training and punishment”, in addition to around 60 heads of State and Government who are championing the cause.

### ***Searching outward***

Outside the Organization, the Secretary-General expressed concern that despite many movements underway to combat gender-based violence, “we are seeing that violence against women and girls in conflict situations is not improving”.

## **Five priorities of the Secretary-General**

- Parity inside the Organization
- Zero tolerance for sexual harassment
- Ending sexual abuse by UN staff
- Prevent and punishing violence against women offenders
- Reversing the trends of undermining gender-based human rights

Combatting this violence, including in families, is what Mr. Guterres called his first “outside priority”.

He identified “a wide range” of ways to do this, from prevention to training and more effective court systems.

The second priority beyond the UN he said, concerned human rights violations, which he said was “very much linked to the pushback aspect.”

Mr. Guterres cited an uptick in the persecution of women human rights defenders, online hate speech, harassment and “vicious campaigns of the worse possible kind”.

“The hatred and prejudice” against “women emerging”, is also “a question of power”, he said, lamenting that legislation, reproductive rights and “even genital mutilation” are moving backwards.

In conjunction with governments and international organizations, civil society has an important role to play in shifting this.

“We need to push back against the pushback in relation to what is a difficult environment for the human rights universe related to the question of gender,” Mr. Guterres spelled out.

The human right agenda in several parts of the world is losing ground and “it is very important that we unite our efforts to reverse this trend”, concluded the Secretary-General.

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## [Syrians still living on ‘razor edge’ as UN launches \\$8.8 billion dollar appeal](#)

An \$8.8 billion funding appeal has been issued by the UN to help millions of Syrians who live a “razor-edge existence” inside and outside the war-torn country, along with the communities struggling to host them.

Eight years since the war began, 12 million Syrians are either refugees or displaced inside Syria; adding up to around half the pre-war population.

Violence has lessened in recent months but the “bombs are still falling”, the chair of a [Human Rights Council](#)-appointed probe, Paulo Pinheiro, told the forum on Tuesday, his comments coming amid airstrikes in opposition-held north-west Idlib governorate and reports that ISIL extremists are close to defeat in eastern Syria.

### **‘Agonizing choices’ for displaced families**

“Around 70 per cent of Syrian refugees live a razor-edge existence below the poverty line,” said [UN High Commissioner for Refugees](#), Filippo Grandi in a [joint statement](#) on Wednesday, who recently visited Syria and Lebanon, where refugees make up a quarter of the population.

“Reduced assistance due to funding cuts means that refugees are forced to make agonizing choices every day,” Mr. Grandi added, “such as taking children out of school to work, or reducing meals.”

Under the UN appeal, \$3.3 billion is required for the response inside Syria, and \$5.5 billion is needed for refugees and host communities in neighbouring countries.

Warning that “the crisis is not over”, [UN humanitarian chief](#) Mark Lowcock

said that without “immediate and substantial” funding, life-saving assistance would likely be affected.

“Every woman, man, girl and boy in Syria who need our help” should get it, Mr. Lowcock insisted.

Echoing that message, Mr. Grandi insisted that Syria’s neighbours “who have been sheltering millions of Syrian refugees for the past eight years” require “no less support”.

UN Development Programme ([UNDP](#)) Administrator, Achim Steiner, also warned of “soaring” poverty inside Syria, before highlighting the need to support Syria’s neighbours too.

“In Syria, poverty is soaring, basic service infrastructure is damaged or destroyed, and the social fabric is strained to the limit,” Mr Steiner said. “Host governments and communities in countries neighbouring Syria need our support to stay the course in extending their generosity to refugees while at the same time maintaining the momentum of their own development path.”

### **‘Bombs are still falling’, Human Rights Council hears**

At the Human Rights Council, the head of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria spoke of the “staggering” number of desperate Syrians forced to flee violence.

“Bombs are still falling and civilians continue to pay with their lives for the objectives of the parties to the conflict”, Paulo Pinheiro said, noting that ongoing hostilities “threaten the lives and livelihoods of those daring to return”.

Insisting that the conflict – now in its ninth year – continues to cause scores of civilian casualties, Mr. Pinheiro said that Syria’s displaced population continues to face many other problems, including in areas retaken by Government forces.

“Persecution, discrimination, and other forms of ill-treatment continue in Idlib, Douma, Dara’a, and northern Homs,” he said. “Arbitrary arrests and detentions continue in Government-controlled areas, including eastern Ghouta, Dara’a, and northern Homs.”

Executions and deaths in detention have also continued, the [Commission](#) chair said on Tuesday, detailing “ad hoc and anti-terror courts of the Syrian Government”, along with “makeshift justice mechanisms” of armed groups and terrorist organisations.

Speaking as the concerned country, the Syrian delegation criticized what it called the politicized climate of the debate and insisted that its Government was simply trying to protect Syrian citizens from terrorism.

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## In South Sudan, mothers teaching daughters 'safer' ways to survive rape

Sexual attacks in South Sudan are so common that mothers now teach their daughters how to survive the ordeal of being raped, in such a way as to minimize the violence. That's according to Yasmin Sooka, chair of the [UN Commission on Human Rights](#), who was [speaking on Tuesday](#) in front of the Human Rights Council in Geneva, during its latest session.

She said that "the protracted conflict in South Sudan has had the most profound impact on women and girls, who have suffered sexual violence, including multiple rapes, at the hands of both government forces and opposition forces."

The Commission, she added, has documented countless incidents of "brutal rapes including multiple gang rapes, sexual slavery, abductions, forced marriage, forced pregnancy, forced abortion, and mutilation of sexual organs, as well as killing."

The on-going culture of sexual violence on all sides, comes despite the signing of a [Revitalized Agreement last September](#), which Ms. Sooka said had led to an "overall improvement" in peace and security, although fighting has continued in Yei state.

The world's youngest country has become riven by civil conflict between forces loyal to the President and his former Vice-President, since 2013, leading to thousands of deaths, more than 2.2 million refugees who have fled across the border, famine in some areas, and a devastated economy.

### **'Every societal norm' being broken**

"The Commission was outraged by the testimony of many South Sudanese women who said that the risk of rape is so high in going out of the Protection of Civilians sites to forage for food and collect wood", said Ms. Sooka, "that they have had to teach their daughters how to respond to their rapists...to minimize the violence."

The rights expert also noted that thousands of youngsters had been recruited by commanders who promised them that they could loot villages and rape women and girls, in lieu of payment.

"These are not random incidents of sexual violence but a systematic widespread pattern and characteristic of the conflict in South Sudan, where rape and sexual violence are used as a tactic of warfare against women and girls by all of the warring parties to sow terror and fear amongst the civilian population", said the Commission Chairperson.

“No one is safe – not young boys, the elderly or the disabled, as the belligerents break every societal norm that has long held the people of South Sudan together.”

Responding to the claims, South Sudan’s Minister of Justice and Constitutional Affairs, Paulino Wanawilla Unango, insisted that sexual offences were punishable under national law.

Mr. Unango also told the Human Rights Council that there had been “no serious military engagement” between Government forces and any other armed group.

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## Europe and UN form bulwark against ‘might makes right’ worldview, EU foreign affairs chief tells Security Council

Ms. Mogherini said that the EU is investing in cooperation with the UN system as never before, and reminded the Security Council that EU Member States collectively contribute one-third of the UN peacekeeping budget, which is “more than any other global power.”

Explaining that EU cooperation with the UN and Africa goes well beyond peacekeeping, Ms. Mogherini said that the current approach of the EU is to act as a “partner of equals” with the continent, rather than simply as a donor, setting common priorities and collaborating closely with the African Union and United Nations. Working together in this way, the three organizations have helped some 30,000 African migrants, formerly held in Libyan detention centres, to voluntarily return home, or find international protection, she said.

She described the United Nations as the key partner for the EU on conflict resolution in Africa, and said that “wherever there is a peace process and a UN peacekeeping mission, the European Union is there to support politically, financially, and with our own missions.”

### **Examples of EU-UN cooperation:**

- Syria: the EU and UN are co-chairing the third Brussels conference on the future of Syria and the region,
- Libya: The EU and UN are members of the “Libya Quartet,” (EU, UN, League of Arab States and African Union), which is coordinating action to bring peace to Libya,

- Venezuela: the EU is working with UN agencies to ensure that humanitarian aid reaches those in need,
  - Mali: the EU is supporting the UN mission in Mali with European training and capacity building missions,
  - [Sustainable Development Goals](#): the EU is strongly committed to the full implementation of the SDGs
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## Political power of women suffering 'serious regression', General Assembly President warns

The former Ecuadorian Minister of Foreign Affairs who leads the 193-member world body, pointed out that in 2105 it would have taken 30 years to close the gender gap, but now, she told the [Commission on the Status of Women](#) (CSW), if current trends continue, gender parity will not be reached for "107 years".

She commended the under-appreciated women of past who "were made invisible, erased from history", saying they "have been protagonists in the destinies of entire nations; of culture and political thinking; science and innovation; and the most significant social changes".

"We don't know anything about many of them" she continued. But for those we do, we must recognize their bravery and "the immense contribution" they made to humanity. "Today we are here for them", she underscored.

Ms. Espinosa praised the leap forward towards full gender parity at the UN, under [Secretary-General António Guterres](#), saying it was a "testament to the fact that when there is political will, and leadership, it is possible to change the course of history".

### **'Push back against the push backs'**

Mr. Guterres informed the high-level event that "for the first time in history, the UN Senior Management Group is comprised of more women than men", adding "we have achieved another first – parity among the Resident Coordinators – our leading officials on the ground."

He noted that resistance and obstacles remained to further progress at the UN, promising that: "We will push back against the pushbacks, and we will not give up until we reach parity across the board".

While the UN was on its way "to reaching parity at all senior levels by 2021", Mr. Guterres lamented that it was far from the case elsewhere.

women continue to be underrepresented in leadership positions in every region of the world – *UN chief*

Women and girls represent [half of the global population](#), yet, women continue to be underrepresented in leadership positions in every region of the world.

As of October, only nine per cent of Member States had a female Head of State or Government and only 24 per cent of parliamentarians were women, according to the UN.

Moreover, in 31 States, women account for less than 10 per cent of parliamentarians in single or lower houses, with four chambers lacking any women members at all. And among the 2018 “Fortune 500” rankings of leading US businesses, only 24 have women CEOs and 12 companies have no women at all on their board.

“We need parity to change power relations”, Mr. Guterres said in conclusion, thanking the gathering “for powering the change our world needs”.

“Without women in politics, sustainable development, human rights and peace, will be seriously jeopardized,” she stated. We need more women in politics”.

### **‘Obligated to be changemakers’**

Speaking on behalf of [UN Women](#), Executive Director Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka said it was “unprecedented” for women to currently hold the presidencies of the General Assembly, Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), UN Women’s board and CSW chair, along with the Deputy Secretary-General post.

While observing that “there are changes”, she flagged some of many challenges, such as that only 10 countries have gender-equal cabinets and only five per cent of all corporate CEOs are women, adding “and these numbers are coming down”.

Because our institutions were “made for men and by men”, we need to make changes otherwise “we are slipping on the job”, Ms. Mlambo-Ngcuka said.

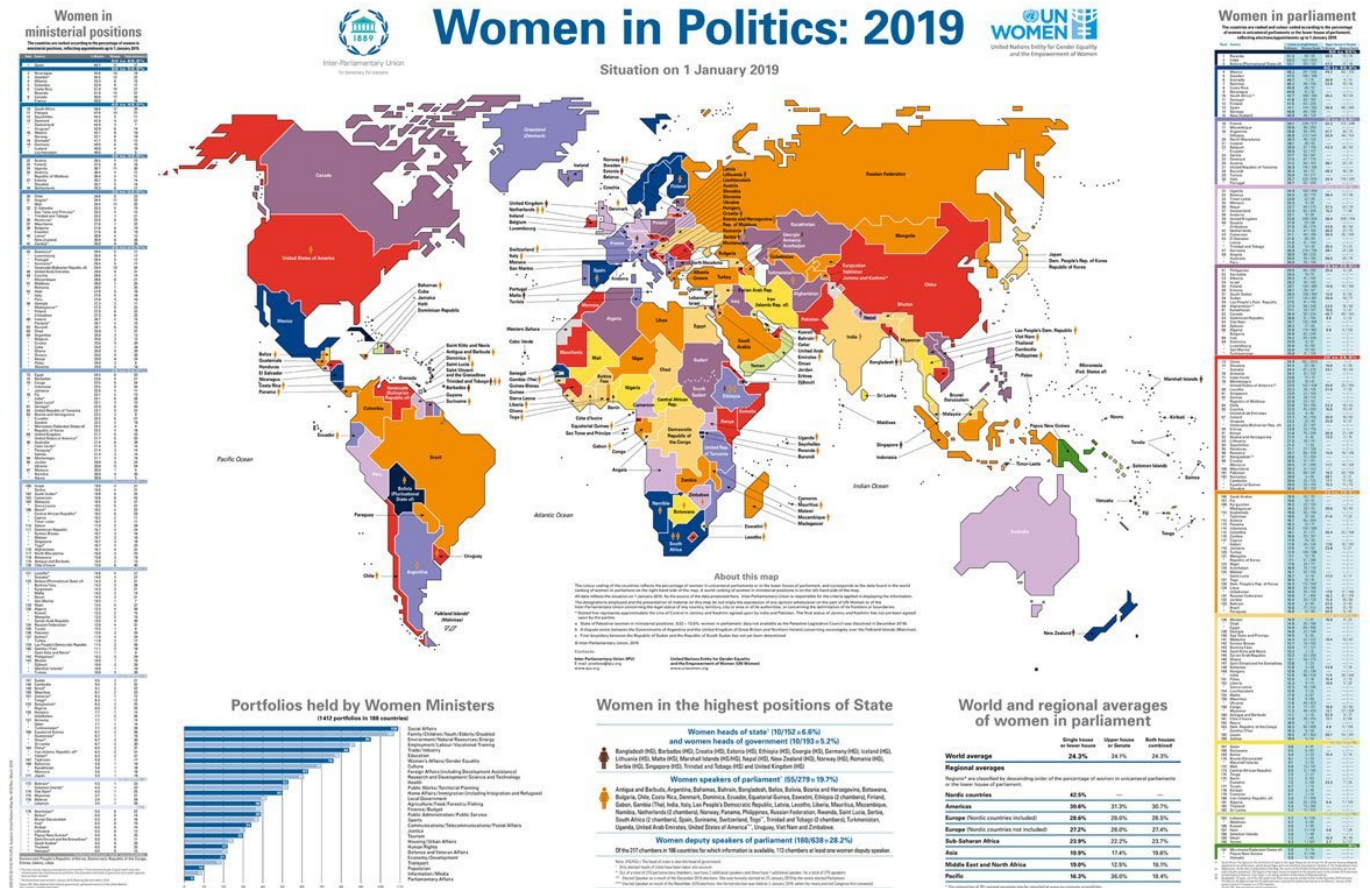
“We therefore, are obligated to be changemakers wherever we are and open paths for other women and lift as we climb”, the UN Women chief stated.

Many speakers highlighted how women are held to a different standard, including having to meet certain requirements when it comes to how they look in public.

Katrín Jakobsdóttir, the Prime Minister of Iceland, noted that just 10 minutes before taking the podium, she had been asked where the Prime Minister of Iceland was. For her part, Marta Lucía Ramírez, Vice-President of Colombia, said that until she introduced legislation to change it, women were prohibited from rising to the rank of General in the Armed Forces.



# Only one-in-five ministers is a woman



Inter-Parliamentary Union

Women in Politics: 2019

Meanwhile, as the CSW meeting was underway, a new study was launched by UN Women and the Inter-Parliamentary Union, revealing that only one-in-five ministers around the world is a woman.

Calling it nonetheless “an all-time” high, the 2019 edition of [Women in Politics](#) indicates that out of 3,922 ministers, 812 are women – a 2.4 percentage points advance on [2017](#) figures.

According to the data presented, women’s representation in top-level leadership has decreased from 7.2 per cent of elected Heads of State to 6.6 per cent, or just 10 out of 153, and from 5.7 per cent of heads of government to 5.2 per cent, or 10 out of 193.

“More women in politics leads to more inclusive decisions and can change people’s image of what a leader looks like,” Ms. Mlambo-Ngcuka underscored, saying “we still have a steep road ahead”.

The study showed that Ethiopia, Mexico, Pakistan, Mauritania, Palau and Tonga saw the strongest gains in the number of women cabinet ministers while that number dropped in Slovenia, Japan and the Philippines. Furthermore, Azerbaijan, Belize, Brunei Darussalam, Iraq, Kiribati, Lithuania, Papua New

Guinea, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Saudi Arabia, Thailand and Vanuatu have no women ministers.

We need “bold moves” if “we are to dramatically increase women’s representation in decision-making” concluded Ms. Mlambo-Ngcuka.