

Concept Note

Asia-Pacific Regional Commemoration of International Women's Day 2021 (IWD 2021)

8 March 2021

“Women in leadership: Achieving an equal future in a COVID-19 world.”

Background

The theme for International Women's Day, 8 March 2021 (IWD 2021) was announced as: **“Women in leadership: Achieving an equal future in a COVID-19 world.”** This theme seeks to draw attention to and celebrates the tremendous efforts by women and girls around the world in shaping a more equal future and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. It is also aligned with the priority theme of the 65th session of the Commission on the Status of Women, “Women's full and effective participation and decision-making in public life, as well as the elimination of violence, for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls”, and the flagship Generation Equality campaign, which calls for women's right to decision-making in all areas of life, equal pay, equal sharing of unpaid care and domestic work, an end all forms of violence against women and girls, and health-care services that respond to their needs.

Regrettably, the levels of women's representation in the Asia-Pacific region still fall below the global average. While the region has seen an increase in the representation of women in national parliaments i.e. from 12.7 per cent in 2000 to 19.9 per cent in 2020, this is still lower than the 2020 global average of 24.9 per cent. The rise of extremism, and the accompanying backlash against women in public life, as well as a general fatigue about addressing barriers to women's access to leadership and decision-making, all present serious challenges. Against this backdrop, civic spaces have been shrinking, while attacks on women in political and public life have been increasing.

These issues carry into the private sector. Within the region, women on average occupy 24.2 per cent of managerial positions in the region, compared to the global average of 27.9 per cent. Factors behind these numbers include discriminatory social norms which have tended to be informed by perceptions of leadership as a male domain. These norms continue to inform organizational cultures and practices. Additionally, many working women face challenges juggling their work with unpaid care and domestic responsibilities, with implications for their prospects for career progression.

In the context of the COVID-19 crisis, from its onset in early 2020, the disproportionate impacts of the pandemic upon women and girls, have been well-documented i.e. showing how they were affected economically, socially, politically, emotionally, and physically¹. Women however featured prominently at the front lines, as health care workers, caregivers, innovators, community organizers and as some of the most exemplary and effective national leaders in combating the pandemic. The crisis highlighted both the centrality of their contributions and the disproportionate burdens that women carry. Women leaders and women's organizations have demonstrated their skills, knowledge and networks to effectively lead in COVID-19 response and recovery efforts.

The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the importance of women's leadership in promoting and ensuring that the perspectives of women and girls in all of their diversity, are reflected in pandemic preparedness and response, as well as in the formulation and implementation of policies and programmes in all spheres and at all stages of pandemic response and recovery.

¹ <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/04/policy-brief-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-women>

Leveraging the theme of this year's International Women's Day, we hope to re-emphasize the importance on advancing women's leadership and participation in decision-making, as a key component of all efforts to advance the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially in addressing the potential long-term effects of COVID-19 on the same.

The Asia-Pacific Regional Commemoration of IWD 2021 will focus on highlighting the ways in which women leaders were able to bring to bear their different experiences, perspectives and skills to the table, and make irreplaceable contributions to decisions, policies and laws, to ensure that they work better for all. The aim will be to provide a virtual platform for women leaders from government, the UN system, the women's and youth movements to share their experiences and lessons learnt in the context of COVID-19, and to discuss ways in which such efforts can be built upon.

The observance of the day will be organized by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and UN Women's Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (ROAP).

Participants in the event will include representatives of the Governments, the diplomatic community, UN system, other international organizations, as well as civil society organizations (CSOs), academia and youth groups.

The event will be held in a hybrid mode i.e. with some speakers in the United Nations Conference Centre (UNCC) in Bangkok, and with online engagement via Zoom and Facebook live, for virtual participants, taking into account the measures that are in place to manage the COVID-19 situation- in line with the latest guidance of the Royal Thai government.

Objectives

The objectives of this event will be:

- To celebrate International Women's Day in 2021 by recognizing women leaders' efforts to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic by bringing to bear their different experiences, perspectives and skills to the table, and ensuring that decisions, policies and laws, are responsive to the needs of all, and the advancement of gender equality and women empowerment;
- To host a dialogue on strategies for advancing women's leadership, with panelists across Asia-Pacific;
- To launch the joint UNESCAP-UN Women regional report, "The Long Road to Equality: Taking stock of the situation of women and girls in Asia and the Pacific for Beijing+25: A synthesis report".

Programme

Asia-Pacific Commemoration of International Women’s Day 2021: Interactive Dialogue on “Women in leadership: Achieving future equality in a COVID-19 world”.

- **Venue:** UN Conference Centre, ESCAP Hall, Bangkok, and Zoom
- **Date and time:** Monday 8 March 2021 (9.30AM- 11.20AM, Thailand Standard Time)
- **Event Mode:** Hybrid participation (both in-person and virtual participations)
- **Platform:** Zoom and Facebook live

Time	Programme
09.00 AM – 09.30 AM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Registration for in-person participants • Logging in and technology set up for virtual participants
09.30 AM - 09.36 AM	<p>Opening MC: Ms. Channe Lindstrom Oguzhan, Social Affairs Officer, Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Section, Social Development Division, UNESCAP</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MC to welcome participants • Opening IWD Video screening
09.36 AM - 09.50 AM	<p>Opening remarks by: :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms. Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific • Ms. Anita Bhatia, Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations and Deputy Executive Director of UN Women (Resource Management, Sustainability and Partnerships)
09.51 AM - 10.00 AM	<p>A launch of a joint regional report: <i>“The Long Road to Equality: Taking stock of the situation of women and girls in Asia and the Pacific for Beijing+25 – A synthesis report”</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A presentation of highlights from the joint regional synthesis report (<i>Video</i>) • Ceremonial launch (ESCAP and UN Women)
10.01-10.12	<p>Special addresses by the ministers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Minister for Women and Child Development, India (TBC)</u> • <u>Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mongolia (TBC)</u>
10.13 AM- 10.22AM	<p>Presentation on Initiative of “Ambassadors for a day competition”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • H.E. Dr. Sarah Taylor, Ambassador of Canada to the Kingdom of Thailand
10.23 AM - 10.58 AM	<p>Interactive Dialogue: “Women in leadership: Achieving an equal future in a COVID-19 world.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moderator: Mohammad Naciri, Regional Director UN Women Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific <p><i>Speakers:</i></p> <p>Women’s leadership in times of crisis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms. Rebecca Barnes, Director of Policy, Ministry for Women, New Zealand

	<p><i>The role of Women’s Rights Organizations in supporting governments’ responses in times of crisis</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms. Sumaiya Islam, Executive Director of Bangladesh Nari Sramik Kendra (BNSK) <p><i>Women leaders in the private sector advancing gender equality and women’s empowerment</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms. Celia Boyd, Co-Founder & Managing Director of SHE Investments • Ms. Ramida Jennie Juengpaisal, Digital Product Designer and Frontend Developer at 5Lab <p><i>How the UN is promoting women’s leadership initiatives</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms. Gita Sabharwal, United Nations Resident Coordinator in Thailand
10. 59 AM – 11.17 AM	Moderated Question and Answer segment
11.17AM- 11.20 AM	Closing of the event (UNESCAP)