

#HandsOffOurSpaces

Open Letter for a Feminist UN Secretary General

At a moment of growing pressure on multilateralism, and the United Nations (UN), the UN Secretary-General (UN SG) selection is pivotal. The UN remains the only universal forum where all Member States can address shared challenges, forge common solutions, and uphold international norms. Its legitimacy and convening power are vital for advancing peace, reducing humanitarian needs, sustainable development, cooperation, and human rights.

The newly elected UNSG will need to build broad and credible consensus, safeguard the UN's integrity, and provide principled leadership in the interests of all, especially the excluded. As the Member States gather for 81st Session of the UN General Assembly (UNGA 81) in New York, we urge you to support UNSG candidate with strongest commitment to Representation, Civil Society Participation, Accountability to the UNGA, and Right to Self-Determination. Building the UN of tomorrow is impossible without these four core commitments. Time has also come to back a woman to be the new UNSG, an indication of Gender parity at the UN's highest level which has been long overdue.

We, the undersigned, urge the UN Member States, through this letter, to support the candidate who has a comprehensive vision to address the challenges our world faces in five critical areas today.

First, inaction on inequality is not acceptable from the UN's highest office. The new UNSG needs to champion the global fight against inequality as inequality emergency erodes social cohesion, trust in institutions, democracy, and sustainable development.

Second, the next UNSG must firmly defend protection of civilians, international solidarity and international humanitarian and human rights law. The UN must use its voice to ensure that no one is left behind, uphold accountability, and challenge impunity— especially when powerful states or their allies are responsible.

Third, the new UNSG, must place climate justice at the core of the UN agenda for future, linking ambitious climate action with reforms to the international financial architecture that advance equity, human rights, accountability, and ensure meaningful participation.

Fourth, the new UNSGs vision for feminist future must be grounded in lasting gender justice, where all women, girls, trans and non-binary people fully enjoy their rights, autonomy, and dignity.

Finally, they must work with the civil society to build UN processes where civil society, movements and grassroots activists are not silenced. Amid a rapid, largely unaccountable technological change, the next UN SG must champion civic participation and fundamental freedoms, including digital rights. Ensuring people can freely organise and speak out –both offline and online – is essential to inclusive governance, democratic accountability, more equitable societies, and countering authoritarianism and oligarchic power.

The new SG can build the UN which works for all 8 billion people on the planet by urgently adopting the alternatives gathered through movements, activists and civil society from around the world.

- Lead the transformation of the international economic order by advancing a just, equitable, and feminist transition beyond growth, centred on care, and based in multidimensional and intersectional metrics, central to the post-2030 agenda.
- Strengthen support for feminist movements in the Global South through significantly increased, flexible, long-term funding provide directly at scale.
- Protect women human rights defenders, feminist movements, and civic space from violence – including technology-facilitated gender-based violence – criminalisation, and repression through robust, enforceable measures
- Support the creation of an International Panel on Inequality within the UN system inspired by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.
- Promote National Inequality Reduction Plans with time-bound, measurable targets – ‘inequality NDCs’ – to reduce inequality to sustainable levels.
- Raise the ambition in the Financing for Development process to support a more equal world, driving reforms to the international financial architecture (IFA) that reduce global political and economic inequality and prioritise public over private wealth.
- Place civilian protection and needs at the centre of all policies and interventions as a top priority, championing principled, gender-just humanitarian action free from political or military conditionality.
- Uphold international legal frameworks by ensuring adherence to IHL, dismantling systems of impunity, and ensuring accountability for violations of international law in conflict settings. This includes advancing reform of the UNSC to prevent its manipulation by powerful actors that undermine the application of international norms, IHL, and the UN Charter.
- Transform the humanitarian system by building a resilient system grounded in international solidarity and complementarity, while enabling a principled ecosystem that shifts power and resources to national and local actors. They should also reinforce Member States’ engagement in sustainable funding mechanisms to support an independent, principled humanitarian system free from political influence and interference.
- Champion a rapid, just, and equitable transition away from fossil fuels keeping the 1.5°C goal within reach, while addressing the disproportionate responsibility of high-income countries, major polluters, and the super-rich.
- Make large-scale climate finance a defining political priority, alongside reforms to the IFA that meet the needs of Global South communities, including for adaptation, loss and damage, and just transitions.
- Strengthen democratic and inclusive multilateralism by ensuring meaningful participation of frontline communities, Indigenous Peoples, women, youth, and Global South countries in global climate governance and decision-making.
- Appoint a top official dedicated to facilitating civil society participation in the UN’s work, in line with the Call to Action for Human Rights and ensure meaningful civil society participation across UN processes.

- Establish an annual Civil Society Action Day to promote the right to freedom of association, along with related rights and freedoms.
- Commit to fully implementing the UN Global Digital Compact and acting on the forthcoming recommendations of the UN Independent Scientific Panel on AI.

Signatories:

Organisations -

1. ACbit
2. ADDEN-MOUGNALE
3. African Women Development and Communications Network-FEMNET
4. Asosiasaun MANEO
5. Asosiasi LBH APIK Indonesia/Indonesia Women Association for Justice
6. Asia Dalit Rights Forum
7. Association For Promotion Sustainable Development
8. Bedari
9. Belun
10. Best Practices Policy Project
11. CEPAM Guayaquil
12. Community Action for Health and Development
13. Community Based Rehabilitation Network Timor-Leste (CBRN-TL)
14. Corruption Brakes Crusade-Uganda
15. Danish Family Planning Association
16. Diaspora2030
17. Economic Justice Network Sierra Leone
18. Empowerment For Her
19. FEIM
20. Feminist Diplomacy Lab
21. Forum ONG Timor-Leste
22. Fundacion Arcoiris por el respeto a la diversidad sexual
23. Fundación Estudio e Investigación de la Mujer FE
24. Global Campaign for Equal Nationality Rights
25. Global Justice Center
26. Global Peace and Development Organization (GPDO)
27. Holding the Line
28. International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)
29. International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA)
30. Keen and Care Initiative (KCI)
31. KULU-Women and Development
32. KVINFO - the Danish Knowledge Centre for Gender Equality
33. Mata Dalan Institute
34. MenEngage Global Alliance
35. National Organisation for Working Communities
36. National Senior Citizen Organization of Liberia
37. Nawi Afrifem Collective
38. New Jersey Red Umbrella Alliance

39. ONG Association de Lutte contre les Violences faites aux Femmes et aux Filles
40. Oxfam International
41. Regional Centre for International Development Cooperation (RCIDC)
42. savie NGO LGBTQI DRC
43. SHIELDTHEM SUPPORT ORGANIZATION
44. Sukaar Welfare Organization
45. Transparency, Accountability, and Participation (TAP) Network
46. United Force for Development International (UF4DI)
47. United Nurses of Alberta
48. Women's International for Peace and Freedom
49. Women's International League For Peace And Freedom (WILPF)
50. Women's Refugee Commission
51. WO=MEN Dutch gender platform
52. WREPA
53. Yuwalaya

Individuals-

1. Amel Flissi
2. Bette Levy
3. Bonnie Berry
4. Dr. Lata Narayanaswamy
5. Emma Borin
6. Hadeel Qazzaz
7. Hajar Bou Chamoun
8. Joshua Ajigo
9. Leah Mugehera
10. Lina Abou-Habib
11. Lodewijk De Witte
12. Lucilene Morandi
13. Mariana Anton
14. Marco Di Cecco
15. Paula Senan
16. Pham Quang Tu
17. Radja SAFFA
18. Rahaf Ebraheem
19. Raounak Nasri
20. Santosh Maharjan
21. Violeta Colmán