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MOBILITY
WITH FAMILY



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HOW TO
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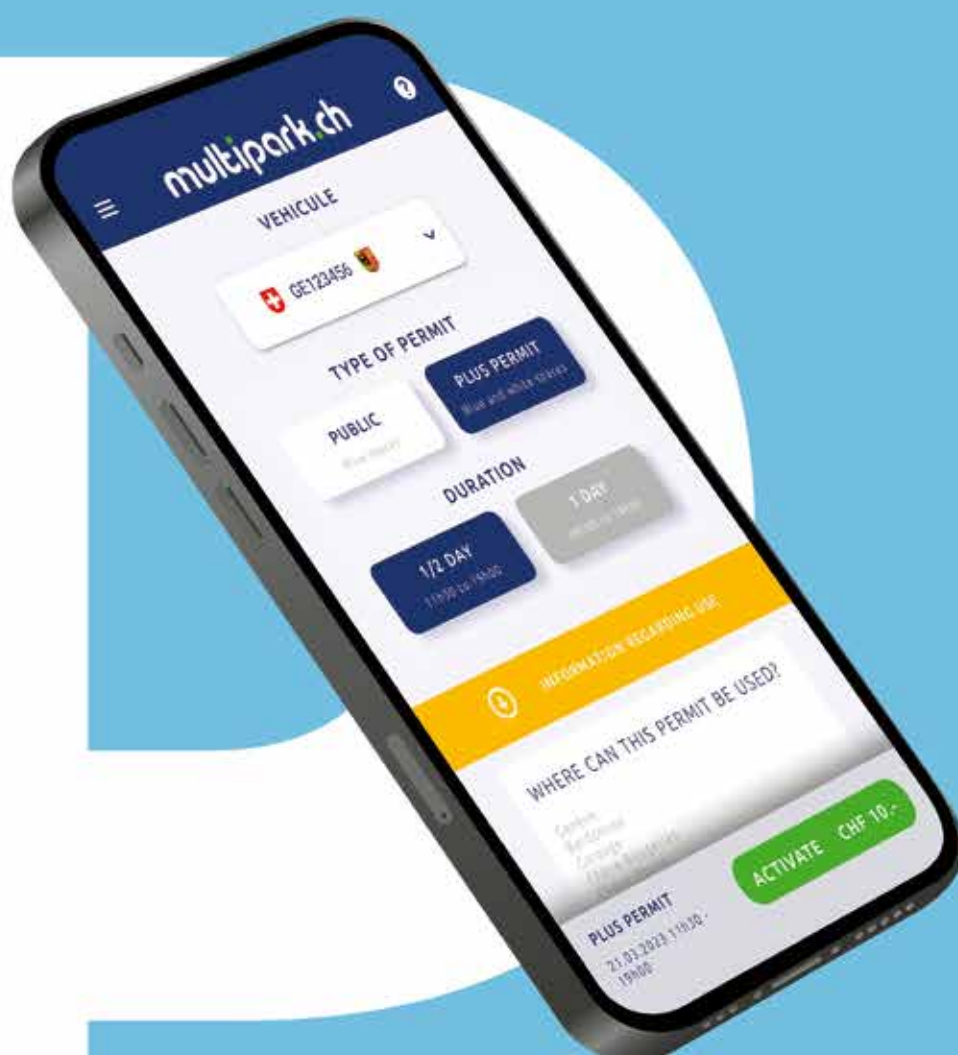
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The fight for gender equality has resulted in many successes and failures. It unites different entities, both governmental and non-governmental on a global scale. The United Nations is a key player in the ongoing battle through the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Despite some progress, there is no guarantee that Goal 5 of the SDGs, dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, will be achieved by 2030.

The fight for gender equality has led to the launch of a series of initiatives at national, regional and international levels. These include the International Gender Champions, a network created in 2015 by Michael Møller, former Director General of the United Nations Office in Geneva, Pamela Hamamoto, US Representative to the UN in Geneva, and Caitlin Kraft-Buchman, founder of Women@TheTable. This initiative aims to bring together decision-makers committed to making gender equality a reality in their sphere of influence. It currently has 330 members from international organizations, permanent missions and civil society.

This issue retraces the history of the creation of the International Gender Champions through a testimony from one of its co-founders, Michael Møller. It also sheds light on the workings of the network and some of its initiatives, including MenEngage circle of Geneva, which is the subject of an exchange between its founder, Paul Bekkers, Permanent Representative of the Netherlands to the UN in Geneva, and Rebecca Grynspan, Secretary-General of UNCTAD.



La lutte pour l'égalité de genre est jalonnée de succès mais aussi d'échecs. Elle unit différentes entités, gouvernementales ou non, au plan mondial. Les Nations Unies jouent un rôle clé en la matière à travers les Objectifs de Développement Durable (ODD).

Toutefois, en dépit d'un certain nombre de progrès, rien ne garantit que le 5ème objectif des ODD, consacré à l'égalité de genres et à l'autonomisation des femmes et des filles, ne soit atteint d'ici 2030.

Le combat pour l'égalité de genres a donné lieu au lancement d'une série d'initiatives aux plans national, régional et international. Il s'agit par exemple de l'International Gender Champions, un réseau créé en 2015 par Michael Møller, ancien directeur général de l'Office des Nations Unies à Genève, de Pamela Hamamoto, représentante des États-Unis auprès de l'ONU à Genève et de Caitlin Kraft-Buchman, fondatrice de Women@TheTable. Cette initiative vise à regrouper des décideurs déterminés à faire de l'égalité de genres une réalité dans leur sphère d'influence. A l'heure actuelle, elle rassemble 330 membres qui font partie d'organisations internationales, de missions permanentes et de la société civile.

Ce numéro retrace l'histoire de la création de l'International Gender Champions à travers le témoignage de l'un de ses cofondateurs Michael Møller. Il met aussi en lumière le fonctionnement de ce réseau et certaines initiatives dont MenEngage circle of Geneva qui fait l'objet d'un échange entre son fondateur, Paul Bekkers, représentant permanent des Pays-Bas auprès de l'ONU à Genève et Rebecca Grynspan, Secrétaire générale de la CNUCED.

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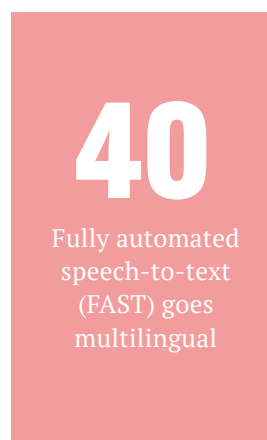
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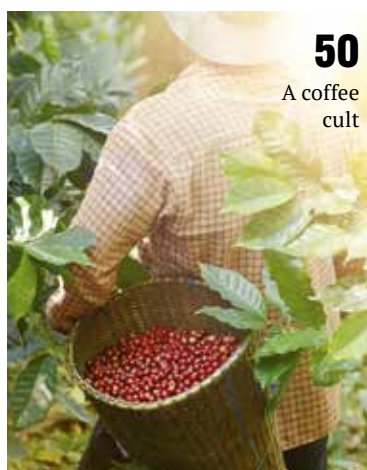
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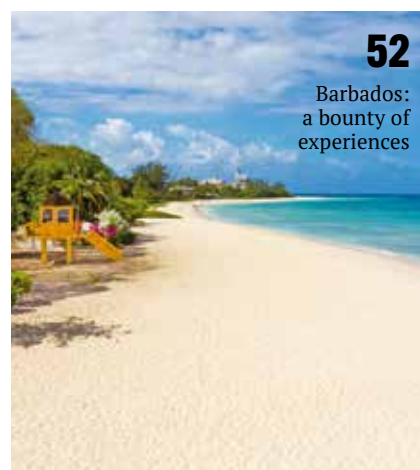
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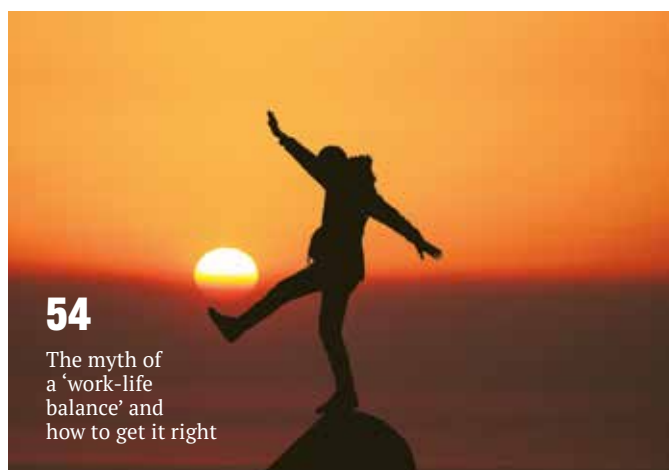
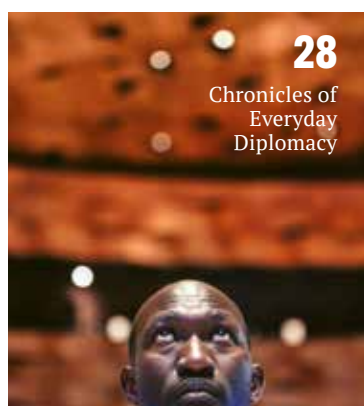
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SDG 5 aims to address structural inequalities faced by women and girls, breaking the barriers for them to fully participate in every aspect of society

Gender equality: the key to unlock the 17 SDGs

Halfway to the end point of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the world is failing to achieve gender equality

UN Women Geneva Office *

In a world of interlocking crises, climate change, political polarization, anti-rights movements and conflicts, the SDG Summit in September 2023 reminded us of the need to step up our efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), highlighting the crucial role of gender equality, cutting across the 17 SDGs.

No crisis is gender blind and women and girls, especially from the most marginalized communities, are disproportionately affected. Nevertheless, women make an enormous contribution to the solution given their role both as environmental and community leaders and human rights activists.

Gender equality is not just a goal within the 2030 Agenda, it is a goal which is the foundation for all other goals. SDG 5 aims to address structural inequalities faced by women and girls, breaking the barriers for them to fully participate in every aspect of society. Given their triple role (reproductive, productive, and community), unleashing and fostering the potential of women will fuel the path to the achievement of the 17 SDGs. The multiplier effect of the SDG 5 accelerates the drivers of economic growth and sustainable development, meaning that sustainable development cannot be achieved without gender equality for women and girls in all their diversity.

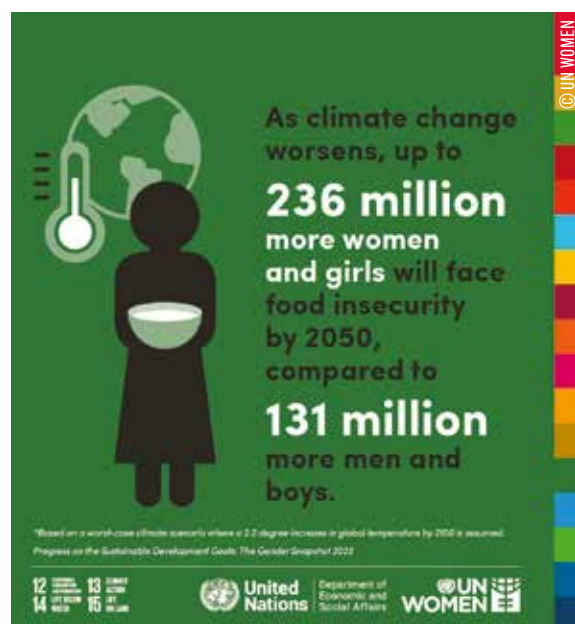
However, halfway to 2030, the world is failing women and girls and the 2030 Agenda as a whole is in peril. Deeply rooted discrimination against women and girls persists, leading to inequalities especially in the areas of political participation, access to sexual and reproductive health, economic empowerment, and legal protection.

“ The world is failing women and girls and the 2030 Agenda as a whole is in peril ”

On the other hand, insufficient data is making it more difficult for researchers to monitor the progress made by the indicators under SDG 5. According to UN Women’s and UNDESA Gender Snapshot 2023, 41 countries, on average are at “target met or almost met” or “close to target” on at least one SDG 5 indicator. Meanwhile, more than 80 countries, on average, are missing data for at least one of the SDG 5 indicators. Globally, no SDG 5 indicator is at the “target met or almost met” level. Ensuring women and girls are equally represented within decision-making processes, promoting and enforcing laws that promote gender equality and non-discrimination and building a world free from violence against women and girls, are key targets under the SDG 5 that remain challenges for all of us.



Across the world, women are more likely to be living in extreme poverty



As climate change multiplies existing inequalities, women and girls are disproportionately impacted

Based on available data for 120 countries, 54% of countries and areas do not have all relevant laws in place in any of the four areas under SDG indicator 5.1.1, on laws to promote, enforce, and monitor equality and non-discrimination on the basis of sex. The gender gap in power and leadership persists with women’s political representation in local governments and parliaments remaining, despite progress, below 40%. Moreover, no country has successfully eliminated gender-based violence.

Every year, 245 million women and girls aged 15 and older are subjected to intimate partner violence, and one in five young women is married before turning 18. Challenging social and harmful norms, as well as allocating enough human and financial resources to prevention and immediate response, are crucial to address it.

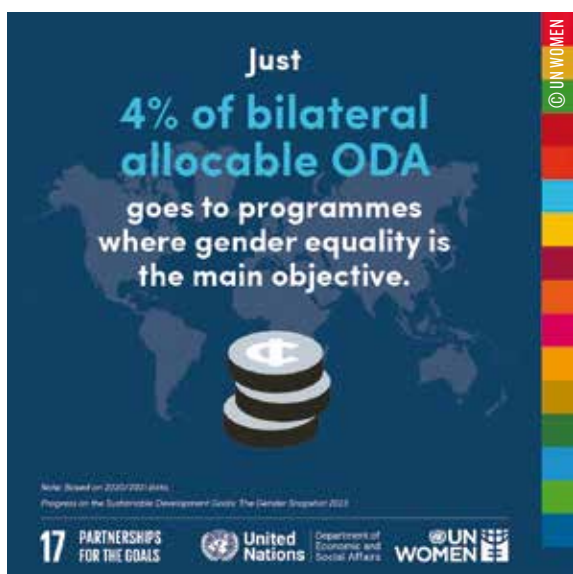
Particularly, an additional \$360 billion per year is needed to achieve gender equality and women’s empowerment across crucial SDGs, including to end poverty and hunger. At the current rate, 340 million women and girls will be living on less than \$2.15 a day by 2030. Progress needs to be made 26 times faster to reach the no-poverty goal for women and girls. Older women face higher rates of poverty and violence than older men. This year’s Gender Snapshot Report has a special focus on them. Older women enjoy universal access to pensions in only 56% out of 116 countries with data, and in 12 of them, fewer than 10% had access to a pension.



The SDG Summit in September 2023 reminded us of the need to step up our efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), highlighting the crucial role of gender equality

When a milestone for gender equality and sustainable societies has just been adopted through a resolution in the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), the International Day of Care and Support (29 October) emerges as an opportunity to acknowledge the disproportionate share of unpaid care and domestic work by women and girls, but is also an occasion to recognize the crucial role of older women in society, including in providing care to younger generations and other relatives. Care is the foundation of every society, and by 2050

women and girls will still be spending 9.5% more time per day on unpaid care work than men. At the current pace, progress towards a fairer division of labor will be too slow to achieve the target by 2030. The International Day of Care and Support will be an opportunity for all Member States, UN agencies and civil society organizations to raise awareness and scale up investments in care policies, jobs, services, and infrastructure required for an equal and gender-sensitive redistribution of unpaid care and domestic work.



While financing gender equality is key to progress, SDG 5 remains underfunded

However, only 26% of countries globally have systems to track budget allocations for gender equality, but gender-sensitive budgets remain crucial to accelerate the path towards SDG 5 and the 17 SDGs by extension.

The closer we get to 2030, the higher the cost. We need to act now. Prioritizing women and girls facing overlapping forms of discrimination, including by investing in data and innovative research and analysis, and collectively and intentionally committing to guarantee equal rights, opportunities, and representation is the only way possible to achieve all the SDGs. ▶

* UN Women came about as part of the UN Reform Agenda, bringing together resources and mandates for greater impact.

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Champions of the IGC Vienna Hub gathered for its fifth anniversary in 2022

The International Gender Champions

How international decision-makers are breaking down gender barriers

Martin Chungong *

Global efforts towards achieving gender equality are at an inflection point. In only a few years, we have witnessed an intensifying climate emergency, war and conflict, have and are living through the COVID-19 pandemic and its socio-economic aftershocks, and have seen a growing anti-rights movement. All these factors undermine the hard-won gains made thanks to decades of gender equality work. These troubling developments are a call to action. As international leaders, we must take bold action to put gender equality back at the heart of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Such action is needed now more than ever.

Recognizing the pivotal role of decision-makers in promoting gender equality was the starting point of

the International Gender Champions initiative. Co-founded by former United Nations Office at Geneva Director-General Michael Møller, former US Ambassador to the UN at Geneva Pamela Hamamoto, and Women@TheTable CEO/Founder Caitlin Kraft-Buchman in 2015, the International Gender Champions (IGC) is a leadership network that brings together decision-makers determined to break down gender barriers and make gender equality a working reality in their spheres of influence.

What began as a common undertaking by a handful of international leaders in Geneva, to date, accounts for over 330 active Champions and over 360 Alumni Champions, who are heads of international organizations, permanent

diplomatic missions and civil society organizations. Champions are based in or affiliated with one of the six IGC hubs in Geneva, New York, Nairobi, Vienna, Paris and The Hague. With its tripartite structure and global reach, the IGC initiative is ideally positioned to effect change in international settings and multilateral forums. By connecting and engaging leaders within and between institutions, the network facilitates a deeper level of collaborative exchange, leverages institutional knowledge, political will and accountability, and generates transformative action to tackle systemic challenges to gender equality. All Champions must adhere to two core pledges: (1) a Panel Parity Pledge, committing to no longer take part in any single-gender panels and to promote equal participation of men and women in international debates, and (2) a Gender-Based Violence (GBV) Pledge to take and advocate for a zero-tolerance stance towards any form of GBV, sexist attitudes or behavior, thus gradually shifting gender norms.

Each Champion also makes two personal commitments, tailored to their respective context, to advance gender equality in their organization, sphere of influence and/or programmatic work. Champions report each year on all pledges made. In 2022 alone, Champions have made a total of 534 personal commitments. In total, 69% of Champions reported having successfully accomplished their commitments; 29% reported having partially accomplished their commitments; 89% of Champions agreed or strongly agreed that

the impact of their commitments was significant; 77% of Champions reported having successfully adhered to the Panel Parity Pledge. On the GBV pledge, 75% reported having spoken up publicly and privately against GBV and sexism, and 50% initiated activities to create and maintain safe and respectful work environments. The same 50% claimed to strengthen support and accountability mechanisms in their workplace and field of work.

Personal actions our Champions have undertaken in the past include: initiating a network to engage male leaders for gender equality, organizing interactive theater plays to raise awareness on everyday sexism in the workplace, hosting self-defense classes for women diplomats, introducing mentoring programs, engaging in consultations with feminist civil society when traveling to country offices and ensuring gender parity in peacekeeping delegations.

The main challenges Champions report encountering when implementing their commitments are time constraints and limited financial and human resources. Therefore, the IGC Secretariat works closely with Champions and their teams to devise S.M.A.R.T. commitments that are realistic, achievable in a shorter amount of time, and whose impact can be measured through tangible results.

In addition to their individual commitments, Champions can set up or join IGC Impact Groups. Led directly by Champions, these multi-stakeholder working groups aim to amplify their own action and bridge gaps between missions, international organizations, civil society, academia and business. Impact Groups concentrate on systemic change across sectors in specific areas such as climate, trade, justice or representation. They identify gender-related blind spots and opportunities, and develop strategic objectives and action plans to promote gender inclusivity in policies, programs and practices.

The Representation Impact Group, for instance, focuses on equitable participation and representation at international assemblies and conferences. This work has included the development of a Gender Responsive Assemblies Toolkit in 2018, which is a reference collection of good practices and lessons learned across organizations. In addition, it has been the starting point for the development of the Gender Gap App (G-App), an open-source software developed by



Promoting gender equality was the starting point of the International Gender Champions initiative



A Champions meeting in Geneva, March 2022

Women@TheTable which provides insights into speakers' demographics and participation. The Vienna-based Impact Group on Gender Equality in Nuclear Regulatory Agencies has taken collective action to improve gender equality and diversity in the workforce by implementing policies and initiatives to build a female talent pipeline and intensify efforts to recruit and retain women. A group of countries and organizations have signed or acknowledged a Charter that commits signatories to advocate for and support the development of more gender-responsive policies at the regulatory level.

Meanwhile, the Trade Impact Group illustrates how collaborations within the IGC can extend beyond the network. Co-chaired by Sierra Leone, Iceland and the International Trade Centre, the group's efforts culminated in the 2017 Buenos Aires Declaration on Women and Trade, the first ever declaration on trade and women's economic empowerment.

Going forward, the IGC Global Board has set three strategic objectives: (1) to promote meaningful action against Gender-Based Violence, (2) to strengthen the Gender-Climate Nexus, and (3) to diversify the IGC network. Under the guidance of the Global Board and in coordination with the various hubs' steering groups, the IGC Secretariat has been amplifying the "I Say No To Sexism" campaign developed by the UN Office at Geneva in 2018, which has been complemented with the recent launch of the IGC "I Say No To Sexism Online" campaign in September 2023. The IGC is

also working towards setting up Climate-Gender Impact Groups in each IGC hub to address the multifaceted interlinkages of climate change and gender (in)equality.

In 2024, the IGC will pilot a new "Youth Champions" program funded by the US Permanent Mission in Geneva, to foster intergenerational exchange and learning. The IGC Secretariat continues to engage and inspire our community of Champions and focal points by organizing regular learning events, spotlighting Champions' initiatives in a monthly podcast and creating engaging content to stimulate organizational conversation, such as an upcoming "Gender Gym" toolkit to promote men's engagement for gender equality.

In the coming year, the IGC will continue to increase the scope and depth of its work to tackle both existing and emerging challenges. By fostering collaboration, driving innovation and deepening our engagement with feminist civil society and youth leaders, we will continue to dismantle barriers on the way to gender equality. We will harness the power of data-driven solutions and explore how we can leverage technology to amplify our impact. I invite all international leaders to join these efforts and contribute to our shared vision of a more just and equitable future. ▶

* Martin Chungong is the Secretary-General of the Inter-Parliamentary Union and Chair of the IGC Global Board.

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USG Grynspan and Ambassador Bekkers

Two gender champions pushing for equality

Secretary-General of UNCTAD, Ms Rebecca Grynspan and the Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Ambassador Paul Bekkers, in conversation about the collaborative effort for equal rights

Mollie Fraser-Andrews *

Ambassador Paul Bekkers, you started the 'MenEngage circle of Geneva' initiative that aims to actively engage male senior leaders in Geneva in the gender equality conversation. What inspired you to start this initiative?

The reason I started this initiative is that I strongly believe that if you really want to achieve equality between women and men, you need to engage men and boys as allies. This is

done too little. By changing the hearts and minds of men, we can break down barriers to the benefit of both genders. In addition, gender is a sensitive topic and, in my view, hampered by an atmosphere of a certain political correctness. I would like to create an environment where men and boys can have a sincere, safe and honest conversation about true and full equality between men and women. Only then can we make real progress, more than has been achieved thus far.

Ms Rebecca Grynspan, why did you decide to become involved in the initiative? Which specific change are you hoping to bring about?

I believe that this issue is at the heart of the most important major transformation that we can achieve in the 21st century. It is a topic that affects everything we represent. I was driven by Paul's initiative - and it is a great idea, to bring men into the conversation in a more central way. We need to change the male perspective to make a difference. As the first woman to become Secretary-General of UNCTAD, I feel the responsibility to participate in this space.

Addressing stereotypes and breaking down the social norms surrounding our understanding of what it means to be a man or a woman can be challenging. How do you overcome resistance or skepticism to your initiative?

PB- Nowadays, few men have a problem accepting equality. It's not so much why but how? It is more a matter of being educated and being made aware of the many gender stereotypes. To do so, we need to learn about the tools of how we tackle this. As an example, when I participated in a course on gender language, my eyes were opened to the fact that even in our day-to-day, communication bias is involved. I realized the intricacies of unconscious bias and the need to draw awareness to this.

RG- This wouldn't be a struggle if there were no obstacles, so we know of persistence and skepticism about the movement for equality. The objectives will benefit everyone and steps are needed to make everyone aware of this. Another element is that sometimes you feel there is a sense of fatigue surrounding the gender conversation, so new initiatives are important to reinvigorate and ignite passion to the movement. During the crises of the last few years, we have experienced a regression in many areas related to gender. We have been reminded that progress is not linear. Given the recent economic difficulties in the world, women have been badly impacted and we are pedaling frantically to stay in the same place. How do we change that? Whatever skepticism is still out there, will require perseverance from those that want change.

PB- We need to understand the deeper reasons for the barriers that are limiting true equality between women and men. We all need to become aware of the fact that by sharing power, everyone will be better off, men as well as women. There is plenty

of evidence. MenEngage opens up the conversation that men are not used to having - but one that is so desperately needed. Regarding skepticism: while there was huge support for the initiative, some people felt a bit uncomfortable about the idea that 'men talk about women'. I hope and believe that we have gone beyond that stage for many years now. MenEngage is not to exclude women, but to focus on men. This is where the real change needs to be.

“ We need to change the male perspective to make a difference ”

RG- I agree with Paul, and there are two things that I would like to share on top of that. One is that unconscious bias is one of the most difficult things to confront, so if communication is broken then issues do not get sorted out. This applies to women too, we have a responsibility to understand each other and our differences to create a sense of togetherness.

Can you share an example of one of your initiatives?

PB- The last event of 'MenEngage circle of Geneva' involved three powerful and successful women talking about their experiences. Rebecca (Grynspan) and the other two shared personal stories about the barriers and problems they have experienced throughout their life and their career. The men that participated were truly touched by the stories and very much engaged. The feedback that I received from the participants was that the event gave them various new insights and the stories triggered them to consider changing their behavior. The men attending the event shared that they became more aware of the issues that confront women in the workplace.

RG- I enjoyed the event mentioned above, especially as the questions were really pertinent. It was an educational process and particularly good to share it with men as we cannot change the world without shifting mindsets. In UNCTAD, I am pushing for the targets for female parity within the organization and to improve diversity within the backgrounds of the female employees. This is not an easy task because there are not many empty posts in headquarters, and so mobility is infrequent. The second initiative is to increase the number of women in trade businesses, so they are lifted out of

vulnerability. Our work with WTO and ITC aims to tackle this issue. In our eTrade program, we invite women who are successful in trade and e-commerce to share their experiences to empower and inspire others. We also work with women in science, encouraging women not to give up the subjects that they are good at. There is still a lot of work to be done by both men and women to ensure equality.

Why did you decide to work specifically with senior leaders and decision-makers in International Geneva?

PB- Simply because it is where I now live. I am privileged to live and work in Geneva with wonderful people - such as my fellow Permanent Representatives, leaders of international organizations and civil society. There is an added advantage of having ambassadors and heads of agencies participate in MenEngage Geneva, not least because they are influential decision-makers. If perceptions and behavior changes for the better, there is the hope that it will trickle down. They have a wide network of people around them, and therefore a large sphere of influence to impact.

“ There is still a lot of work to be done by both men and women to ensure equality ”

RG- I would also like to see senior leadership and decision-makers in International Geneva take an active role in this important work so it can trickle into important discussions, in the multiple institutions represented here.

What is the biggest personal learning you have drawn from working on this topic?

PB- The more I learn and know about it, the more I realize the need for change and the amount of work still to be done. The complexity of the issue and subtlety of mechanisms that keep women away from achieving their full potential is enormous. The fabric of society is related to who we are and how we behave, and it humbled me to realize there is so much more to be done. I am, however, optimistic about the potential of men to change. It is a matter of awareness and giving men the necessary tools. The strong and formidable

Advisory Council of MenEngage Geneva consists of eight women, who give us feedback on whether we are on the right track. This is incredibly important as we firmly believe in the principle “nothing about us, without us”.

RG- This has been a long journey for me! The other day I was asked about the most important literary works I was inspired by when I was young, and I said one of them was the book by Virginia Woolf, ‘A Room of One’s Own’. It is such a complex issue and I am more reassured now that men have taken action to support gender equality. I was very focused on the women’s side for so long and time has brought about that important change. When I was younger, we wanted to open doors for women and break the glass ceiling. Through time, we have understood that men need to be a part of this revolution. I am also aware that nothing happens automatically; we are here today because of the women who fought for our rights before, so I feel a sense of responsibility for the future generations. I have become aware that there is a difference in terms of what you achieve individually and collectively. When you are young, you think you can do it all yourself, the ‘superwoman syndrome’ kicks in, but this change requires a collective effort. We must give more credit to feminism and dispel the negative connotations of aggression and the anti-men narrative that people associate with feminists. The essential desire was always for equal human rights.

Lastly, what is a key piece of advice that you would like to share with men – at all levels of the organizational hierarchy- who want to become change agents for gender equality?

PB- We need to see women for what and who they really are. People may have gifts and qualities that others may lack, so we see the value in difference and help each other achieve our full potential. Meanwhile, sometimes men need to take a step back to make place for women to be able to step into the limelight.

RG- I would advise men to have the self-awareness and reflection that you are in a multicultural environment, and that you need training for this new environment. I would also add that we need to embrace transformation and change. ■

* Mollie Fraser-Andrews is the Editorial Coordinator of UN Today.



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The new 'I Say No To Sexism Online' campaign seeks to tap into the potential of connective technology for gender equality

Logging into equality

With its new campaign, 'I Say No To Sexism Online', the International Gender Champions are setting out to combat technology-facilitated gender-based violence

Clara Laviale and Hannah Reinl *

Information and communications technologies have opened up new opportunities and aided efforts towards promoting gender equality. However, they can also be used as tools to perpetrate Gender-Based Violence (GBV). While there is no internationally agreed definition for the term, technology-facilitated GBV is defined by UN Women as any act of violence committed, assisted, or aggravated by the use of information and communications technologies on the basis of gender. It encompasses a wide range of sexist behaviors and actions online including online harassment, gendered hate speech, intimate image abuse, trolling, and sharing of deepfake images.

Amplified by the anonymity, scale and speed of the internet, the lack of law enforcement mechanisms and gendered gaps in digital literacy, technology-facilitated GBV has become a pervasive issue across the world. It targets primarily women,



The logo of IGC's new campaign 'I Say No To Sexism Online - #LogIntoEquality'

particularly young women and girls, women facing intersecting forms of discrimination, such as women of color or diverse sexual orientations and gender identities and women in public life. According to the Economist Intelligence Unit, 38% of women globally have personally been subjected to online violence, 65% reported knowing other women who had been targeted online, and 85% of women reported witnessing online violence against

other women. The political, social, and economic consequences of technology-facilitated GBV are significant. It increases the digital gender divide, silences women's voices, has serious impacts on victims' health and well-being, and undermines their safety, reputation, freedom of expression and participation in the digital realm.

To address this pressing issue, the International Gender Champions (IGC) Secretariat, in partnership with the United Nations International Computing Centre (UNICC), launched its 'I Say No To Sexism Online' campaign in September 2023. It builds on the 'I Say No To Sexism' campaign, first launched in 2018 by former Director-General of UNOG and IGC co-founder Michael Møller, and relaunched in September 2022, to address sexism in the workplace. The campaign complements the IGC's GBV Pledge, one of two IGC core commitments, requiring each Gender Champion to uphold a zero-tolerance stance towards any form of GBV, sexist behaviors and harmful norms - both offline and online.

The new 'I Say No To Sexism Online' campaign seeks to tap into the potential of connective technology for gender equality by building awareness, engaging senior leaders as positive role models, and promoting actionable pathways towards digital safety for all. To educate on the negative implications of technology-facilitated GBV, the IGC Secretariat produced a short educational video and developed a resource repository which can be found on the IGC website along with a series of informative social media posts. Furthermore, a variety of online communications assets and templates have been made available for the IGC community to share within their respective virtual networks and support organizational messaging against

technology-facilitated GBV. A 'Champions Guide for Action' has also been developed to encourage senior leaders in and beyond the IGC network to take effective action against online GBV within their spheres of influence by offering concrete suggestions. Finally, Champions across the IGC's six hubs in Geneva, New York, Nairobi, Vienna, The Hague and Paris are participating in a social media challenge, highlighting their commitment to ending technology-facilitated GBV and challenging their peers to do the same. ▶

WANT TO GET INVOLVED?

We encourage everyone to #LogIntoEquality and join the campaign to help us create a chain of positive messaging for a sexism-free online world. The IGC Secretariat created a range of communications tools, including an educational video on technology-facilitated GBV, social media cards, GIFs, email signatures, virtual backgrounds and/or profile picture filters. They can be downloaded via a publicly accessible Trello board and shared across personal and professional networks. We say no to sexism online. What do you say?



* Clara Laviale is a Junior Professional Officer, and Hannah Reinl is a Senior Project Officer, at the International Gender Champions Secretariat.



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Vers de nouveaux équilibres mondiaux

Directeur de l'Institut de Relations Internationales et Stratégiques (IRIS), Pascal Boniface décrypte les conséquences du conflit en Ukraine

Muriel Scibilia *

Fondateur de l'IRIS, un des principaux centres français de recherche en matière de relations internationales et de stratégies, Pascal Boniface anime une chaîne Youtube « Comprendre le monde ». Auteur de plus de 70 ouvrages, il vient de publier « Guerre en Ukraine. L'onde choc géopolitique. »

En quoi le conflit armé en Ukraine marque-t-il un tournant inédit dans les relations internationales ?

C'est un événement d'une grande importance mais cela ne constitue pas une rupture systémique. La guerre en Ukraine amplifie et cristallise des tendances préexistantes. Cette guerre n'est pas la première sur le continent européen depuis la fin de la guerre froide mais c'est la première fois que

les occidentaux se sentent menacés, considérant qu'elle bouleverse l'ordre stratégique. Face à la menace militaire et nucléaire russes, il leur apparaît que seuls les Etats-Unis sont en mesure de les protéger. L'OTAN, en tant que structure de sécurité, s'est renforcée avec notamment l'entrée de la Suède et de la Finlande, deux pays qui ont toujours été neutres même pendant la guerre froide. Le paradoxe, c'est que tandis que le leadership américain se raffermi en Europe, il s'effrite partout ailleurs. Les pays du Sud global ne veulent pas être mêlés à ce conflit perçu comme se jouant entre pays européens tout en reconnaissant qu'ils en subissent les conséquences négatives. Par ailleurs, la rupture entre la Russie et le monde occidental est durable. Il semble peu probable de pouvoir renouer des relations « normales » tant que le régime actuel sera en place.

En janvier 2024, six pays vont rejoindre le groupe des BRICS qui comprend l'Afrique du Sud, le Brésil, la Chine, l'Inde et la Russie. Quelles sont les conséquences de cet élargissement ?

Il s'agit de l'Arabie saoudite, des Émirats arabes unis, de l'Argentine, l'Iran, l'Éthiopie, et l'Égypte. Outre de faire contre-poids à l'ordre mondial, dominé par les puissances occidentales, le renforcement des BRICS est un pas de plus contre le dollar en tant que monnaie d'échange internationale. En août, lors de leur sommet à Johannesburg, ils ont annoncé vouloir « dédollariser » leurs échanges.

Les BRICS sont-ils en train de remplacer le G77 en devenant le porte-voix des pays du sud ?

Sans remplacer le G77, il est clair qu'ils prennent de plus en plus d'importance. Ils représentent une part très importante de la population et de l'économie mondiale. A onze, il est plus facile d'être cohérent. Comme le G20, ils organisent un sommet annuel. S'agissant du conflit en Ukraine, ils ont opté pour



Pascal Boniface, Directeur de l'IRIS

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une neutralité active. Aucun membre n'a condamné l'agression ni pris de sanction contre la Russie.

Que doivent faire les pays d'Afrique pour obtenir la place qui devrait leur revenir dans la recomposition en cours au plan mondial?

Leur admission au G20 est un succès important. À la fin du 20ème siècle, on qualifiait le continent africain de « perdu pour la mondialisation ». Aujourd'hui, c'est celui qui représente l'avenir de la mondialisation. On assiste à une bataille d'influence pour conquérir le cœur et l'esprit des Africains. De nombreux pays, parmi lesquels la Chine, l'Inde, les Etats-Unis, le Brésil, les Émirats arabes unis, la Turquie ainsi que l'Europe, cherchent à se rapprocher de l'Afrique et y être présents.

L'Afrique est-elle de plus en plus courtisée pour être de plus en plus pillée?

Tout le monde veut accaparer ses matières premières. Mais comme les pays du continent sont multicourtisés, ils ont plus d'options. Je n'irais pas jusqu'à dire qu'ils ont les cartes en main parce que la situation économique et stratégique de bon nombre d'entre eux reste fragile, mais ils sont moins dépendants.

Alors que les défis économiques, environnementaux et sociétaux lient les populations du globe, les concertations entre Etats sont plus nécessaires que jamais. Comment transformer l'ONU pour qu'elle soit mieux adaptée à la nouvelle donne mondiale?

Il importe de garder à l'esprit que l'ONU est un instrument pas une baguette magique. À partir du moment où les grandes puissances entretiennent des relations confrontationnelles,

l'ONU est relativement impuissante. Toutefois, contrairement à ce que pensent certains, le monde irait plus mal si l'ONU n'existait plus. Elle permet de mettre de l'huile dans les rouages de la vie quotidienne internationale et de faire de la prévention. Transformer l'ONU peut passer par un élargissement de la composition du Conseil de sécurité. Il est composé de 15 membres mais seuls cinq d'entre eux sont permanents et peuvent exercer un droit de veto : Chine, États-Unis d'Amérique, Fédération de Russie, France et Royaume-Uni. Ce qui bloque le fonctionnement du Conseil. Les pays démocratiques des BRICS sont candidats.

Dans un an les chefs d'Etat et de Gouvernement vont se réunir à New York pour conclure un Pacte pour l'avenir. Quelles perspectives peuvent-ils donner aux 2 milliards de jeunes de moins de 14 ans pour créer un futur désirable?

Il reste essentiel de trouver des moyens de coopération malgré la guerre en Ukraine qui obscurcit le paysage international sans pêcher par excès d'optimisme. En période de conflit, quand les perceptions sont aussi divergentes, il reste difficile de trouver des points d'accord et de faire des concessions.

Le conflit en Ukraine a quasiment fait sauter l'Agenda 2030. Est-il encore un outil pertinent?

Bien sûr. Une partie des objectifs fixés vont être atteints. Bien que la guerre en Ukraine ait détourné l'attention, le travail continue. ▶

* Muriel Scibilia est auteure et ancienne fonctionnaire de la Conférence des Nations Unies sur le Commerce et le Développement (CNUCED).



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SRSJ M'jid meets with children in Ethiopia

Ending violence against children

The champion of children's rights *par excellence* espoused the cause at only 12 years old

Valerie Coutarel *

As Corneille once wrote: "For souls nobly born, valor doesn't await the passing of years". This is what comes to mind when you talk to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children (VAC), Najat Maalla M'jid. A pediatrician by profession, she was only 12 when she started advocating for children's rights and against child labor in her home country, Morocco. Back then, working with street children, she fought hard to make politicians consider children as vulnerable and in need of protection, rather than as delinquents. The experience she later acquired managing up to 13 mother and child hospitals while volunteering for children in institutions, allowed her to gain precious experience and to realize that listening to children is key. They need to be considered as actors and not only as recipients of services.

From 2008 to 2014, she was UN Special Rapporteur on the thematic issue of the sale and sexual exploitation of children, before starting to work as an expert in child protection. She later became a member of the Advisory Board on zero tolerance for sexual abuse and exploitation within the UN. In 2019, she was appointed SRSJ on VAC. When it comes to her current position and mandate, they stem from the 2006 Global Study on Violence Against Children led by Sergio Pinheiro and aim to prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against children, while implementing the results of the aforementioned study.

There are many drivers of VAC: poverty, hunger, discrimination, conflicts, social disparities, unemployment, climate change, and many more. To tackle this vicious cycle, it requires all stakeholders

in the education, health, social and financial sectors, under an all-of-UN approach. As SRSG M'jid puts it: "Child protection and wellbeing go beyond the social sector, and it isn't only about SDG 16.2, it interlinks with all SDGs". This is why, together with UN sister agencies, she works to ensure a continuum of action and to strengthen country systems at all levels using Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) to mobilize states and key stakeholders to prevent and protect children from violence.

With conflicts, violence, and natural disasters on the rise, her office recently published an advocacy brief on 'Enhanced Protection of Children on the Move.' More than 42 million children are displaced worldwide, many are deprived of liberty, face discrimination, exploitation, xenophobia, and pre-existing harmful practices. Children must be protected regardless of their status. As we have seen with the war in Ukraine, Europe lacks child protection systems, cross-border coordination, and counter-trafficking initiatives. Now more than ever, we need to strengthen action in times of crisis and make sure children are truly protected.

Her small 11-person strong office moves heaven and earth to enact change, fighting on all fronts to make sure children are taken into account, heard and protected. It is a delicate balance to be struck. "The children I have met over my career, in camps, on the streets, in institutions, everywhere, have proven to be highly resourceful, they take initiatives and need to be listened to, all of them, from street children to straight-A children", advocates SRSG M'jid.



SRSG Najat Maalla M'jid speaking with children in Vietnam

As a mother myself, I cannot help asking Mrs. M'jid about what children are exposed to online in our increasingly digital world. "What is happening online is a huge problem", says the SRSG. Children are exposed to sexual abuse, cyberbullying (according to the World Health Organization, 15% of children worldwide are victims, and that is a conservative figure), hate speech, promotion of suicide, enrollment in armed groups, criminal gangs, violent extremist groups, harmful content, gambling, identity theft, use of their image, etc. "I have worked with Interpol, I have seen the most abominable images of children, babies even, abused", says the SRSG.

“ One child can be the victim of various forms of violence, consecutively or simultaneously ”

Part of the solution lies in working with ICT companies to make them accountable. We must use social media and the ICT sector to make sure they provide guidance and responsible services, while allowing children to express themselves and have access to safe information. States should also be involved and regulate more, which is an uphill battle. Obviously, parents also have a major role to play; they should think twice before posting pictures of their children which are regularly copied and used by pedophile networks, supervise the way their children use online tools, and resist the temptation to use screens as a convenient babysitter to keep them quiet. "As a pediatrician, I can tell you that screen exposure is highly detrimental, they are addictive and cause social isolation", says the SRSG. All over the world, a whole-of-society approach is needed to make sure we act now.

Unfortunately, we are lagging behind. The solutions so far aren't enough and it is never too late to do more. "When you meet children with the light still behind their eyes, not all hope is lost. When that light disappears, it is too late. I have seen far too many children that have been mentally crushed and I just cannot accept it". ▶

* Valérie Coutarel is Chief of the French Interpretation Section at the UN in New York.



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Global warming is here to stay. How will we make changes to protect our planet's future?

Summer's burning message: time for proven climate action

This past July was declared the hottest month ever recorded in human history. What warning does this serve for us all?

Daniela Cuellar Vargas, Roberta Boscolo and Jesse Cruz *

This summer was marked in history with an alarming surge in wildfires, rising oceanic temperatures, and discussions surrounding “heat domes” and “marine heat waves” – all serving as stark reminders of the harsh reality of global warming.

The impact of these extreme weather events has been felt worldwide, with severe rainfall and flash floods wreaking havoc in Beijing, devastating wildfires ravaging regions like Corfu and Arctic Canada, and unprecedented heatwaves scorching Phoenix, Arizona. As these events

escalate in frequency and intensity, they pose significant challenges to achieving international goals and national targets related to climate change.

The escalating heat and rising greenhouse gas levels are undeniable threats to our planet. Earth's temperature is set to rise further, with projections indicating a high likelihood of surpassing July's record in the coming year, partly due to the intensification of the new El Niño. Breaching the critical 1.5-degree Celsius threshold, agreed upon in the Paris Agreement, looms on the horizon.

While some regions may currently be spared from extreme weather, the consequences of a warming planet are inevitable and will continue to impact crucial sectors like health, food, nutrition, water, and the environment.

Given the severity of these weather events, early warning systems play a pivotal role. A mere 24-hour warning for an approaching storm or heatwave can reduce damage by 30%, and with an investment of \$800 million in developing countries' early warning systems potentially preventing losses ranging from \$3 to \$16 billion annually, this cost-effective tool can save lives, curtail economic losses, and provide substantial returns on investment.

However, despite their proven effectiveness, only half of the countries worldwide have adequate multi-hazard early warning systems, and significant gaps in existing systems may hinder their effectiveness. United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres is committed to closing these gaps and ensuring comprehensive coverage of early warning systems.

Early warnings for all

The UN SG's Early Warnings for All initiative is a groundbreaking effort to ensure, by the end of 2027, that everyone on Earth is protected from hazardous weather, water, or climate events through life-saving early warning systems. By adopting a people-centered, multi-hazard early warning system approach, work across four key areas is brought together under the initiative, including: risk knowledge, observations and forecasting, communication and dissemination, as well as preparedness to respond.

As we reach the midpoint of the 2030 Agenda, the urgency to address the climate crisis is undeniable. Extreme weather events increasingly



Early warning system workshop held in the Maldives, July 2023

undermine progress towards meeting the Sustainable Development Goals and fulfilling the commitments made in the Paris Agreement. Safeguarding individuals from these hazards demands prioritization of inclusive early warning systems, especially for vulnerable communities.

To ensure a comprehensive approach, our efforts must span multiple sectors: food security, clean energy, water and sanitation, good health, well-being, gender balance, and economic prosperity. Only through such a holistic approach can we protect those at risk.

“ Only half of the countries worldwide have adequate multi-hazard early warning systems ”

The Early Warnings for All initiative is co-led by WMO and UNDRR and supported by pillar leads ITU and IFRC. Additional implementing partners include FAO, OCHA, UNDP, UNEP, UNESCO, REAP, and WFP.

The initiative raises political awareness of the need to invest in people-centered early warning systems to help countries to adapt to climate change. It also promotes collaboration and synergies across all partners working on early warning system implementation.

The Early Warnings for All initiative articulates four pillars for implementation:

- **Pillar 1:** Risk knowledge and management;
- **Pillar 2:** Observations and forecasting;
- **Pillar 3:** Dissemination and communication;
- **Pillar 4:** Preparedness to respond.

These pillars are aligned with recognized global guidance on the key components of multi-hazard early warning systems. This year has focused on the country-level implementation phase, with the key steps in the kick-off phase being of top priority.

Step 1 - stakeholder mapping: to identify and map out all relevant stakeholders in the country, to clearly aid in defining roles, responsibilities, and gaps in engagement and coordination. The mapping includes government agencies, non-governmental



Journey for water in Shyamnagar Union, Satkhira in Bangladesh

organizations, academic institutions, private sector entities, communities at risk, and donors.

Step 2- national consultative workshop: to present the initiative, secure institutional buy-in, present ongoing early warning work in the country, identify an appropriate coordination mechanism, discuss gaps and priority technical needs for support. A key outcome is agreement on the most appropriate coordination mechanism for early warning systems and the identification of priority technical areas of support required.

Step 3- gap analysis: to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the existing early warning systems and highlight areas for improvement. A minimum core capability checklist developed by the Early Warnings for All initiative can be made available for the gap analysis at country level.

Step 4- national plans / roadmaps for technical support: the action plan or roadmap should set out how to bridge the identified gaps, and outline the key actions, technical support and capacity required to improve the effectiveness of early warning systems, as well as agreed timelines and budget.

Step 5- implementation, monitoring and reporting: to monitor progress in countries, and to strengthen reporting on Target G of the Sendai Framework, which tracks progress on early warning systems.

Spotlight on the Maldives

The Maldives held a national workshop (July 4, 2023), as part of its commitment to the Early Warnings for All initiative. The workshop brought together participants from government, local councils, civil society, the private sector, the UN Country Team and Early Warnings for All pillar leads. The event reviewed the current state of early warning systems in the Maldives, identified priority areas for action, and strengthened multi-stakeholder early warning coordination. Participants agreed to formulate a common agenda to guide the scale-up on national early warning systems, which will be implemented with the support of the partners of the Early Warnings for All initiative. Participants also engaged in the further elaboration of an UNEP-led planning exercise for a GCF early warning proposal.

Looking ahead

With COP28 around the corner, now is the time for the global UN community to unite and dedicate a concerted effort to the Early Warnings for All initiative, as we stand at a critical juncture in tackling the climate crisis and fortifying adaptation and resilience for future generations. ►

* Daniela Cuellar Vargas is a Coordinator working on EWforALL. Roberta Boscolo and Jesse Cruz are her fellow colleagues at the WMO.

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Chronicles of everyday diplomacy

Antoine Tardy *

What goes through the mind of a young student who grew up in a refugee camp in Rwanda when he is about to address hundreds of delegates at a large-scale conference in Geneva?

What has his journey been to reach this point?

What does the future hold for him? ►

* Antoine Tardy is a freelance photographer based in Geneva (antoinetardy.com / Instagram: [@antoinetardyphoto](https://www.instagram.com/antoinetardyphoto)).





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Ms. Kira Kruglikova, participating in an event for the Division of Administration

New opportunities in leadership

Kira Kruglikova, the Newly Appointed Chief of Administration at UNOG, tells us about her life as one of the leading figures at UN Geneva

Prisca Chaoui *

In an exclusive interview, we delve into the intricacies of Kira Kruglikova's new role and the weighty responsibilities that come with it.

Kira, congratulations on your new role. Can you tell us more about your role and your priorities as the newly appointed Director of Administration at UNOG?

Thank you, I am honored the Director-General gave me this opportunity and I am excited to contribute to the organization in this new capacity. Leading UNOG's Division of Administration (DOA) is also

a great challenge. DOA is first and foremost a service provider, supporting the UN's work towards peace, rights and wellbeing. DOA provides services in human resources, budget and finance, central support and ICT to entities and staff located here and elsewhere. DOA is effectively the landlord of the Palais des Nations, managing the buildings, the grounds, the IT network, and the physical conference rooms and their infrastructure. The United Nations Office at Geneva hosts over 5500 high-level meetings annually and one of the Director-General's priorities is keeping the Palais a modern hub for conferencing.

My highest priority is to provide outstanding core administrative services. The Division excels in many areas and I'm fortunate to lead such a solid team. We are still working on our vision statement, but the core of it is to sustainably meet the needs of those we serve at a fair price. People receiving our services should have what they need when they need it with a minimum effort on their part; people paying for our services should see they get good value for money and people providing services should have the resources they need to do so, day in and day out, with the satisfaction of a job well done. So much has already been achieved – one award-winning example of DOA's innovation in service provision is our successful Client Support Centre (CSC). Whenever I've used the CSC as a staff member, I've had great results.

We are on a mission to expand that excellence through improving our communication with clients, addressing overlapping functions, and simplifying our service delivery, ensuring all stakeholders are consistently well-informed and well-served. I think it's important we remember our place in the global landscape: we are here to strengthen

and support those who have substantive roles in the organization, who are working to promote international cooperation and peace. What we do is make sure they can perform their duties under the best possible conditions, with minimal friction.

You've inherited the massive Strategic Heritage Plan (SHP), a renovation project costing over CHF 800 million. How are you addressing potential setbacks, especially in such a grand project?

The SHP is a huge project that the Member States adopted in 2015 to keep the Palais des Nations one of the premier conference centers in Europe and provide a safe, effective workplan for its occupants. A lot has happened in the eight years since then, including construction of the Building H, where my office is. Renovation of the historic Palais is well underway with some buildings already back from renovation – Section AC and Building D, and others to be done soon – the remaining parts of Building A (Assembly Hall and Section AB) and Building S1. The contract for the Building E work – removing the tower and renovating the conferencing area,

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The Strategic Heritage Plan is a monumental project, costing more than CHF 800 million

was signed in January. David Mc Cuaig, the Project Director, has built an excellent team and they've done great work under difficult circumstances. Their latest initiative, bringing Lean construction management to the worksite, is typical of their proactive approach to addressing problems. Lean is already showing benefits through improved collaboration and clearer understanding of what is needed to keep on track.

“ My highest priority is to provide outstanding core administrative services ”

Jumping into the project at this late stage means that my role is more about looking at what happens when the project is done, currently scheduled for the second half of 2026. DOA colleagues in the Facilities Management Section and the ICT Service will be operating and maintaining the renovated Palais, so I have prioritized their active engagement in the project. It's also about asking a lot of questions for me to understand where things are going and whether they still make sense – and almost always they do. When they don't, I have a role in approving Design Program Changes (DPCs), which are how the SHP adjusts to reflect new requirements and changed technologies. Such changes can generate costs and/or delays, so are not undertaken lightly. I am committed to consulting widely and taking decisions quickly, balancing the benefits of the change against its impact on an already tight budget and a delayed schedule.

As UNOG's Focal Point for Disability Inclusion, I also very much appreciate the work SHP is doing to improve the accessibility of the Palais for people living with disabilities. Whether it's adjusting the tables in conference rooms so wheelchair users can fit or installing guiding strips for people who are blind or with low visibility, the new Building

and newly renovated buildings better fit the UN's Disability Inclusion Strategy (UNDIS). I'm so excited about these upgrades and we are planning a special event for World Toilet Day in November to showcase the new accessible toilets.

Let me close by saying how much I love my work with the SHP. My experience in conferencing and as one of the major tenants of the Palais has shaped my approach to the project. I'm very grateful to have so many dedicated professionals from different areas working together. SHP is a complicated, intricate puzzle and I always enjoy working across functions, finding the best way forward together. What we do together here and now will greatly shape the experience of staff, delegates, and visitors for decades to come.

We'd love to know more about your day-to-day. What does a typical day look like for you?

My days are typically packed with meetings from 9 a.m. when I start through to late afternoon, and I try to leave by 7 p.m. Time zone differences also occasionally mean late-night sessions with our colleagues in New York. This is how I like to work: engaging in collaborative sessions across teams, with clients, and through internal discussions. Participating in conversations and confronting diverse perspectives is what keeps my thinking sharp. I take advantage of my lunch break to spend time with colleagues and catch up with friends. But it's not all work!

Outside the professional sphere, balance is also something I strive for. My mornings often begin with a walk – a moment to step outside and appreciate our beautiful surroundings, followed by 15 minutes of meditation. Dancing is another passion of mine and I try to attend classes right here at UNOG a couple of times a week. I also make it a point to connect weekly with my family back in the U.S. through online bridge playing sessions. To literally stay flexible – important at my age – I do pilates every week. At night, once I've finished with emails, I do some online language classes and a quick glance at the news. I've started writing short stories every day, modeled after the morning pages practice in Julia Cameron's 'The Artist's Way'. By the time I go to bed, the house is usually already quiet, and I am often the first one up to start the day... It's safe to say I don't have a lot of down time! 🍌

* Prisca Chaoui is the Editor-in-chief of UN Today.

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Are decisions based on gender or personal choices?

Going to the field is often a personal choice, especially when it means leaving behind a spouse and children

Gihan Aboulezz *

When I was nine years old and in the fourth grade, my teacher said to me: "Someday, I see you working for the United Nations". At that time, I did not know what the "United Nations" was. I asked my teacher that question and she replied, "It's a big place that helps the world". Well, that was exactly my cup of tea. I wanted to "help the world". My teacher said this to me because I was always volunteering to do everything at school.



Gihan Aboulezz shifting perspectives on traditional gender roles

From writing poems to the birthday classmate of the day, to cleaning erasers, to volunteering at nursing homes and playing the piano on Saturday afternoons for senior citizens, I have always had a great interest in helping others.

I fulfilled my teacher's prophecy in 2001 when I was lucky enough to nab an interview at the United Nations headquarters in New York, in the Oil-for-Food Program. My interview was on September 11, 2001, at 9:45am with the Treasurer of the former Department of Management. It took me one year to get that interview, which was subsequently canceled (and you know why). It was a chaotic and sad day for New York.

“ It is challenging raising a family and trying to excel in your work at the same time ”

My interview was rescheduled for late October, and I was offered the position to start on December 17, 2001. I enjoyed the work immensely as a finance officer. Finance was my forte, as I came from the private sector doing just that. After serving 4.5 years in that role, the program was nearing an end, and I applied for and was recommended for a field position in the United Nations Mission in the Sudan (UNMIS). As I spoke fluent Arabic, I was thrilled. However, I did two things wrong: (1) I did not educate myself on the rules and regulations of the UN and did not know that I was basically relinquishing my headquarters post, and (2) I thought my husband could handle three children and their schedules (ages 16, 13, and 8) while I was away on this adventure. I was grossly negligent (and wrong) on both counts.

After serving only six months in this role at UNMIS, my husband informed me that he was basically having a nervous breakdown handling the two older boys who were inconveniently going through their growing pains and ‘rebellious’ phases, and my 8-year old daughter who took much too long getting ready for school in the morning, replying to my husband through the bathroom door that “being a woman takes a lot of work to get ready in the morning”.

Although I was enjoying my field work, I knew I had to come back. To what though, was the question. I learned the rules of the Organization the hard way and took a lesser position, simply because there were no other choices for me. I ended up in administration, which I knew little of in terms of the UN. I quickly got through the learning curve and stayed in administration (and in my role) for over 16 years. But I love what I do now, and I love my team and I love going to missions and conducting workshops and review visits. What did I learn? That educating oneself on the rules of any organization is essential. I also came to prioritize my family over my work. My boys came to terms with their rebellious teenage years and turning my husband’s hair prematurely gray. They graduated from university with advanced degrees and are now married with homes of their own. My daughter also graduated from university and is now married. She still takes a long time to get ready for anything, but now that’s her husband’s problem.

I often wonder if I were a man, would I have been faced with the same dilemmas? Maybe yes, maybe no. Perhaps it’s up to the person really, on how to figure it out. Not so much the gender, but the person.

Does it have to do with being a woman or does it have to do with making choices? I would like to think that I am still “helping the world”. When I got into the UN, I invited my fourth-grade teacher, whom I had kept in touch with, for lunch at the Delegates Dining room. She was thrilled. I was thrilled that she was thrilled.

“ It is important to understand the rules of your organization before making any decisions ”

I used to hear my mother always say: “hold the stick from the middle” which essentially translates to: “don’t overdo anything”. It is challenging raising a family and trying to excel in your work at the same time. Many women and colleagues do it, they are able to “hold the stick from the middle”. I work in the Board of Inquiry Unit now, in the Department of Operational Support. Along with my wonderful supervisors and team, we help make the UN safer with a better working environment for all members of the personnel. Did I feel uncertain at times? Yes. Did I feel as if I was given the shorter end of the stick for giving up a field position for a lesser role? Yes. Did I think it unfair? Yes. But then, I also learned to enjoy the journey and to feel proud of my accomplishments, notably my three children and the work of the organization that I have contributed to in my 23+ years of service. ▶

* Gihan Aboulezz is Chief of the Board of Inquiry Unit in the Department of Operational Support at the United Nations.

Research-based, half-day programme for students aged 7-14 years old, with dyslexia and/or AD(H)D.





Great learning comes from engagement at the community level

Building a sustainable world

Delving into the world of Milasoa Chérel-Robson,
UN staff member for 15 years and pioneer for change

Mollie Fraser-Andrews *

Working for UNCTAD for more than 12 years is no mean feat, and yet Milasoa Chérel-Robson has not stopped there. Originally from Madagascar and with an economist background, she has the experience and knowledge to bridge the gap between numbers and social inequality.

Back in 2017, she was honored to be asked to be at the table of speakers in Geneva during a town hall meeting with Secretary-General Guterres when he first took office. It was there that she put forward the need to strengthen initiatives for resource pooling across the different pillars of the UN if we want more impact.

After spending 12 years at UNCTAD, she decided it was time to leave. She was Acting Head of the Regional Office for Africa, in charge of coordinating UNCTAD's strategic inputs during the lead up to the signature of the Agreement establishing the historic African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) in March 2018. During our interview, she expresses how she was grateful to the then UNCTAD Secretary-General, Dr Kituyi, for entrusting her with the role.

In early 2020, she was selected to join the UN in Haiti and experience what it meant to attempt to support the country to move forward on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus. She

describes it as a “challenging and life changing experience”. During her time there, the President of the country was assassinated, gang violence reached an all-time high and the country was impacted by an earthquake.

Following her departure from UNCTAD and UN Haiti due to family circumstances, she set up Maison Soa, a three-pronged approach “to co-create a world that reflects the best and the beautiful in each of us. It is a space to gather around our yearnings to act and gain knowledge for greater impact.” The initiative commits to economic, social and climate justice with a community focus across three pillars: Soa Citizens, Soa Sisters and Soa Inspiration.

Mila created Maison Soa as a personal and a family initiative to try to walk the talk of sustainability in both her professional and personal life. Maison Soa acts and shares knowledge and inspiration to build a sustainable world. The initiatives believe that both are needed to generate the necessary mindset shifts to accelerate the path towards the achievement of the SDGs. The core team is composed of her children and a wider circle of young people.

“ Maison Soa is a personal and a family initiative to try to walk the talk of sustainability ”

Soa Citizens is where Mila contributes through her advocacy work as an economist and as a sustainable development professional. Her current work portfolio covers the Democratic Republic of Congo, Madagascar and the pan-African network of IRED, a Swiss NGO. Mila’s actions under Soa Citizens are rooted in a strong sense of commitment towards national counterparts in all her assignments as a UN staff member or as a consultant, as well as in a sense of accountability towards specific people she met during her fieldwork in Madagascar when she was doing her PhD at the University of Sussex.

Madagascar has one of the highest poverty rates in the world, with almost 80% of its population suffering from income poverty and being vulnerable to external shocks. The country’s

southern regions suffer from extreme poverty and an increasing frequency of extreme weather events linked to climate change. That’s why Maison Soa’s pilot activities are concentrated through specific empowerment events this first year, and actions in collaboration with local associations as of its second year.

Soa Sisters is where Mila carries out her work as a feminist committed to gender equality and acting locally in Madagascar. As part of the implementation of Maison Soa initiatives, the Soa Sisters Antsimo program in Madagascar is being fine-tuned, supporting the empowerment of educated women from the Southern part of the country to become change agents for sustainable development. It will start its first physical workshop in November.

As a strong defender of female empowerment, Mila promotes women in both her social and professional life, with seminars aimed at building key skills for women to manage their career. At UNCTAD, she co-led the first series of Gender Lectures and co-founded the women’s network where she runs seminars aimed at building key skills for women to manage their career. She aims to help first-hand (as a trainer of mentors) in the Inspired Women Lead mentoring program that benefits women from 85 countries.

At the international level, each year, Mila makes sure to personally mentor and sponsor up to three women directly. She also established a dedicated space within Maison Soa, @soaqueendom on Instagram, to support women to build inner strength to stay the course. Its motto is “Sustainability begins with self.” Soa Queendom held its first live event in Geneva on 21 September, with a group of 20 women gathered around the theme of “Health and Fitness: A Long-Haul Journey”. The long-term plan is to hold occasional physical meet ups with those located in Geneva, and eventually internationally.

Mila’s background gives her a great ability to look both at the bigger picture and at the human level. She says: “My ability to see the bigger picture mindset and understand the connections between the economic and social realities has been essential to my work in international development.” She also adds that taking a step back, going back to the basics and being trained for many years in different subjects gives you a head start over those that are learning on the



Maharavo and Tiana from Maison Soa

job. “It means you can contribute to the team in a bigger way that you would otherwise. I think that slow progress towards the achievement of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals prompts us to do more and to be clear and certain we have the right people in the right positions. It is not all about the polycrisis.”

Mila is concerned by the global reputation that Africa has as the continent where developing countries struggle the most. The reasons for this are that firstly, Africa has strong associations with hunger, poverty and conflict. There is another narrative that sees Africa as the land of opportunities. There are 1.4 billion people and 55 countries - with many stories of success and failures within this large population. It is also home to countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the largest producer of transition minerals such as cobalt, required for the development of green energy. It contains one of the largest forests of the world, putting it center stage in carbon sequestration at the global level.

She refers to the idea of “shared responsibility” when she remarks, “When you consider that many African countries got their independence in the 1960s, it is hard to imagine the lived experience of what it means to have been colonized and to be expected to just pick it up from there, as if nothing had happened. Unfortunately, even in the

best of circumstances where economic growth has been constant, it has not been inclusive. A big part of the work for change lies with African citizens. However, if we want to change the perception of the continent, then the international community must also honor its pledges for support. In addition, shared responsibility means tackling reform of the international financial infrastructure. Accessing finance to fuel the much-needed sustainable development path that African countries want to engage in is hard as interest rates are much higher for them.”

Mila’s mission encompasses the international priorities on economic and gender-related objectives. She makes the point that the gender equality agenda is slow, not for lack of knowledge, but the lack of political and societal will to move forward with many legal and policy frameworks. She concludes: “When I see the number of feminist activists and economists in Africa, it reassures me that women are involved in the conversation. It is critical to align economic and gender goals if we want to accelerate progress on the SDGs. It is not the lack of legislation, it is perception and mindsets that need to change.”

* Mollie Fraser-Andrews is the Editorial Coordinator of UN Today.

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Automatic speech recognition (ASR) systems, like the one behind FAST, are great at learning through examples rather than instructions

Fully automated speech-to-text (FAST) goes multilingual

Have you ever sifted through a recording of a meeting and wished someone had taken notes of it for you instead?

Sofia Lobanova Zick *

Over the past five years, a small team in the Division of Conference Management (DCM) at the United Nations Office at Geneva has been working with the Advanced Technology Applications Center of the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) to teach a deep recurrent neural network to recognize spoken words in six languages and to output them in the form of an automatic transcription. Meet your new note-taker, FAST, for Fully Automated Speech-to-Text, powered by WIPO AI. You can

check what the youngest child born of our inter-institutional collaboration has learned to do so far by looking up any public meeting on the Digital Recordings Portal, where the transcripts are displayed in parallel to their respective audios, by language channel. You will notice the resulting text is synced to the recording, essentially rendering it searchable. Looking up a keyword in the transcript will take you directly to the corresponding place in the audio to check against delivery.

While we may take understanding and being understood for granted, those are remarkably complex tasks. The fact that computers can emulate them at all and do so with such impressive results is nothing short of astonishing. Children and non-native speakers - basically anyone learning a language - would surely concur.

In fact, try to remember learning how to read, how to associate sounds with letters. Do you remember your first ABC book? Hearing a grown-up articulate /'si:/ /'e:/ /'ti:/, while you watch the tip of their finger take a trip of three steps to tap, at three, on the "t"... C-A-T. This is a /'kæt/, you hear them say. Cat.

Automatic Speech Recognition (ASR) systems, like the one behind FAST, and machine learning models in general are not all that different from children. They are great at learning through examples rather than instructions. The more examples, the better. FAST was trained on thousands of hours of utterances with matching text.

Still, similarly to children and non-native speakers, FAST might get flummoxed by acronyms, terms, and

proper names that it has never heard before or seen written down. It sometimes struggles with punctuation, paragraph segmentation, and capital letters. Like all of us, it stumbles when the sound quality is poor or when speech is heavily accented, atypical, obstructed, overlapping or inaudible. When we are tuned to listen to an English speaker, an unexpected accented "je vous remercie" might throw us off, and it would take our brains a moment to recalibrate or to make up something English-sounding instead. Likewise, language detection is not trivial for an ASR. Somewhat counterintuitively, the further removed languages are from each other phonetically, the more it stumps the machine. Whereas Romance languages might all lump together for a human ear, a computer can shift back and forth between them with relative ease. While gear shifts from French to Russian to Arabic to Chinese will be clearly discernible to us, current ASR models are likely to falter.

Mondegreens, or mishearings with hilarious outcomes, are also something we have in common with speech recognition models. ASR-generated

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FAST has worked very hard to learn new languages

captioning relies on a predictive text component. Guesswork based on the context and word probability, or frequency of use, is no stranger to our brains. What were the chances that Jimi Hendrix's "Excuse me while I kiss..." would finish with A) "this guy" or B) "the sky"? In the end, we are all just trying to make sense of similarly sounding waveforms, otherwise known as oronyms, as best we can.

Some things that take no additional cognitive effort on our part, like understanding words spoken in a female rather than a male voice, are more complex for speech recognition models. The often cited reason for that is that women have tighter and thinner vocal cords producing sounds of a higher pitch or frequency and resulting in different waveforms that are harder for an ASR system to process. The real reason? Unlike humans, it just hasn't been exposed to enough examples of those sound waves to learn from. This is why UNOG's training data for FAST included plenty of female voices.

Some things are infinitely easier for a machine though. No matter how fast we write, type, or render speech in shorthand, we will never be able to produce a workable draft transcript of a 3-hour meeting in under fifteen minutes. Those three hours cannot be compressed by our brains, less so transcribed at such speeds. If you get tired or distracted and miss parts of what was said in a meeting, FAST has your back.

To give the human child-machine analogy one last stretch, let's take a look at how we measure what either one of them has learned. We don't crack children open and go poking in their brains to understand how well they have absorbed studied material. The black box of a machine learning model is also resistant to poking. Instead, we assess and score their performance. We have them take tests. One of the most important and challenging tasks for the FAST project team is to create such tests, or so-called "Gold Standard" evaluation sets, in each language. The demos shared by commercial ASR providers often resort to cheating. Transcribing a voice of a middle-aged male native speaker enunciating clearly and slowly reading out a generic text in a room with no ambient noise will likely get you a near 100% accuracy score. Like a competitive language examination, the Gold Standard tests must be representative of the UN register and subject domains in all of their complexity. Furthermore, they must be true to a real-life conference environment with its hustle and bustle, speeds of delivery, surprise transitions between languages, speakers with speech difficulties and more non-native, female, and ageing voices.

“ FAST might get flummoxed by acronyms, terms, and proper names which it has never heard ”

I am proud to report that we have taught FAST well. It took several tests so far, competing alongside the industry heavyweights, such as Google, Microsoft, and Amazon, and outperformed them all in both English and French.

The English version of the FAST transcription tool has been used for over three years now to deliver automatic searchable transcripts to meeting attendants, secretariats, and staff. In 2022, the service was expanded to French and Spanish, and the meeting transcripts found a permanent home on the Digital Recordings Portal. Since September 2023, we have been testing Arabic, Chinese, and Russian versions of the tool. Please be sympathetic to its struggles and occasional mistakes, FAST has worked very hard to learn new languages. 🍷

* Sofia Lobanova Zick is a FAST Project Manager at UNOG.

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Michael Møller, during the official launch of the Geneva Gender Champions network on 1 July 2015

UN Memories: Why I founded the International Gender Champions

As gender equality remains a distant reality, engaging international decision-makers is essential to set us on the right path

Michael Møller *

From 2013 to 2019, Michael Møller served as the 12th Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva. During his time in office, he co-founded the International Gender Champions, a leadership network bringing together international decision-makers to break down gender barriers.

“The idea of creating the International Gender Champions began with an eye-opening report by the World Economic Forum, stating a disheartening number: if we were to continue with business as usual, so the report said, gender parity would not be

reached for another 274 years. As Director-General of the United Nations Office in Geneva (UNOG) and as a concerned citizen, this number struck me as utterly unacceptable. What could we do, I wondered, to set us on a different path?

I struck up a conversation with the US Permanent Representative to the United Nations in Geneva, Ambassador Pamela Hamamoto, and Caitlin Kraft-Buchman, CEO and Founder of Women@TheTable. I was fortunate that these two exceptional and visionary leaders not only

shared my determination to change the status quo but were also willing to actively contribute with financial and operational support. After multiple conversations and brainstorming sessions, the idea of the International Gender Champions (IGC) was born. We agreed that if we were to catalyze change, we needed to engage with leaders who could wield significant influence. Engaging a demographic with such busy schedules and vast portfolios, however, meant that we needed to design a compelling, but easy solution: easy to understand, easy to implement, easy to measure and hold people to account.

With these guiding principles in mind, we set out to craft the IGC core model: at its heart, we devised a Panel Parity Pledge, a resolute commitment applying to all members of the network, requiring leaders to never again participate in single-gender panels, events or discussions. Each Champion would also be tasked with implementing two personal annual commitments tailored to their specific organizational context. These commitments were designed to incentivize leaders to weave gender equality into the fabric of their institution. Whether through the implementation of gender policies, the promotion of work-life balance, or the provision of facilities for breast- and bottle-feeding, these were practical actions aimed at promoting inclusive, accommodating and family-friendly workplaces for all.

We started reaching out to international leaders in Geneva and were pleasantly surprised by how quickly our initiative gained traction. Whether it was during speeches, interviews or casual conversations, we made it a point to keep the conversation going. Many leaders had not previously dedicated much thought to gender equality or the needs of their female staff members previously. Sporting our emblematic IGC pins like proud badges, we were like salespeople, tirelessly convincing people of the necessity of our cause and gently nudging them to take action. Soon, a critical mass of Champions emerged and it became a matter of personal and institutional pride to participate in our initiative. Being a Gender Champion was no longer just a label, it became an expectation for senior leaders to accept their responsibility in role-modeling an urgently needed change.

Personally, I decided to make my commitments as a Gender Champion about introducing the first gender policy in the UN Geneva. In a collaborative

effort, we created a strong policy framework, which was later adopted by many other organizations. Based on the feedback I received, this policy not only changed the way we hired, but it also changed the way our female staff perceived their work environment. In a workplace that made equity and inclusion an organizational priority; women felt seen. Within a couple of years, we managed to achieve almost 50:50 representation among our staff and appointed gender focal points within all departments. Reaffirming my commitment as a Gender Champion on a daily basis sometimes required vigilance. Walking into a meeting room in the Palais and seeing only men on the panel, I would walk straight out of the room again. I informed organizers of men-only events that not only would I not attend their event, but also that they would not be allowed to use rooms on the UNOG premises unless they ensured that both men and women participated meaningfully in their event.

“ We needed to design a compelling, but easy solution ”

While these measures might seem a bit drastic, they helped accelerate progress towards gender parity. Our initiative was now solidly anchored within International Geneva and soon started gaining traction beyond. The Geneva Auto Show, a rather masculine event, saw the male Head of Government give space to one of his female colleagues to open the event. The head of a big private sector company, inspired by IGC, decided to change his company's recruitment policy to hire pregnant women, and was rewarded with extraordinary levels of staff productivity, loyalty and retention. Our initiative was now firmly on the map, and the buzz we had created continued to propel us forward. We expanded, opening chapters in various countries and UN duty stations. Alumni Champions, who had finished their term in Geneva and went on to serve in new roles and contexts, carried our mission with them. When the current Secretary-General - who had already joined the network in his capacity as UN High Commissioner for Refugees - was elected, he brought the initiative with him to New York and made gender parity a system-wide priority. Within a couple of years, senior UN leadership was more gender equal than it had ever been.

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3

Live by IGC's core values,
that is


Championing equality through a set of beliefs

Reflecting on these first years of the IGC, I still find myself surprised at how our initiative evolved from an idea brainstormed by three people to a movement that quickly became unstoppable. With more financial backing, we might have achieved even more, even faster. But what we lacked in financial means, we made up for with passion and commitment, creating a meaningful impact in the pursuit of gender equality as we went along. To sustain and build on these gains in the future, I hope to see the IGC and UN Women collaborate even more closely to amplify their impact. I want to encourage all Gender Champions to harness the potential of social media and digital communications to continue expanding the initiative's reach and create a chain of positive messaging for gender equality. I also hope to see more active involvement and partnerships with youth agents of change to help build a future generation of leaders for gender equality and promote intergenerational learning and exchange.

“ We must break out of our bureaucratic comfort zones ”

As the IGC has matured, I believe that its mission can extend its reach much further. Gender equality should not be confined to the realms of the UN or the diplomacy hubs of New York, Geneva, Vienna and the like. It is a principle that can, and should,

transcend geographical boundaries and permeate the various segments of our societies. IGC has the potential to not only go global geographically, but also to become a force for change in diverse sectors, including the private sector.

Our world is in turmoil and there are numerous pressing issues, including major existential problems, competing for our attention as leaders. But it is imperative that we recognize that we cannot hope to find solutions to these global challenges unless we ensure that women, constituting half of humanity, are fully engaged, contributing, and thriving in the conversations and efforts to address these issues. Gender equality is not just a matter of equity, it is a practical necessity. We cannot stop advocating for gender equality in practical, action-oriented ways. When we discuss how to ensure a better future for all, we often encounter two constraints in large bureaucratic structures such as the UN: a reluctance to take risks and an aversion to failure. But you cannot have change without taking risk or failing. We must break out of our bureaucratic comfort zones and look ahead to discern that bold action is required to reach our destination. Gender equality plays a pivotal role in shaping our collective future, and achieving it means collaborating, being innovative, taking (smart) risks and conceiving audacious solutions to move the needle forward as quickly as we can.” ▶

* Michael Møller is the former Director-General of UNOG and co-founder of the International Gender Champions.



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Beds with patients in an emergency hospital in Camp Funston, Kansas, in the midst of the influenza epidemic

As the flu season begins, those at high risk should get vaccinated

2023 marks the 105th anniversary of the 1918 Great Influenza pandemic, a devastating event

Sebastian Zielinski *

2 023 marks the 105th anniversary of the 1918 Great Influenza pandemic, a devastating event where over a quarter of the world's population were infected and as many as 50 million people died. Influenza pandemics are a serious and ever present threat, and the next one could be right around the corner. Since the 1918 pandemic, a further three influenza pandemics have occurred (Asian flu in 1957, Hong Kong flu in 1968, and swine flu in 2009). The question is not if but when will a new virus emerge to transmit from human to human and start spreading.

Influenza is also a very common seasonal virus. As many as a billion people get the flu every year, with 3 to 5 million cases of severe illness, and about

290,000 to 650,000 deaths due to respiratory disease alone. Although these facts and figures are rather glum, the good news is that we have come a long way from 1918.

So, what are the symptoms of seasonal influenza? Symptoms vary but can include a fever, cough (usually dry), headache, muscle and joint pain, feeling unwell, a sore throat and a runny nose. The cough can be severe and last two or more weeks. Thankfully, most people recover from their fever and other symptoms within a week without requiring medical attention. However, if you haven't improved after a week or your symptoms are unusually severe, for example you have chest pain or shortness of breath, seek help from a medical

professional. Those individuals at higher risk for developing severe disease include pregnant women, children under five, the elderly, individuals with chronic medical conditions and immunosuppressive conditions and those at higher risk of exposure, such as health care workers. Seasonal epidemics occur mainly during winter, which in Geneva would correspond to the months of October to April, peaking from December to February.

The most effective way to prevent the disease is annual vaccination, which anyone can have but WHO recommends; especially to those at higher risk listed above. Safe and effective vaccines have been around for more than 60 years. WHO conducts a vaccination drive every October, which is available to all WHO staff, as well as staff of UNAIDS, ICC, UNITAID, and retired personnel. If you feel you may be in the high-risk category, check with your place of work or local doctor to see if they provide vaccinations. Apart from being inoculated, you can also reduce your risk by doing the same things we did during the COVID-19 pandemic: regularly wash your hands, avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth, and avoid contact with sick people. For those who are unwell, cover your nose when coughing or sneezing and self-isolate (to prevent spreading it to others).

The influenza virus was first discovered by Wilson Smith, C.H. Andrewes and P.P. Laidlaw at London's National Institute for Medical Research (NIMR) in 1933. With support from the US Army, the first flu vaccine was developed by Thomas Francis and Jonas Salk at the University of Michigan. The vaccine was tested for safety and efficacy, before being licensed for wider use in 1945. During the 1947 flu season, researchers discovered that existing vaccines were no longer effective against the flu viruses circulating at the time and needed updating. To investigate the viruses in circulation, the World Health Organization Global Influenza Programme established the Global Influenza Surveillance and Response System (GISRS) in 1952. Initially there were 25 countries who had some form of influenza surveillance in place and were able to report data to WHO, and as of 2023 the network has grown to 132 countries, areas or territories. A total of 160 institutions, including 151 National Influenza Centres, seven WHO Collaborating Centres, four Essential Regulatory Laboratories, and 13 Reference Laboratories are part of the network. Every year, millions of specimens are tested and hundreds of thousands of viruses are exchanged. When COVID-19 came around, it was often the influenza laboratories in the GISRS network that became COVID-19 centers.

“ GISRS played a critical role in the COVID-19 pandemic and, as such, further concretized its important position in the global surveillance architecture ”

Dr Sylvie Briand, Director of Epidemic and Pandemic Preparedness and Prevention, WHO

Through efforts by scientists across the world, it was discovered that influenza viruses constantly evolve into new variants in a process called 'antigenic drift and shift'. To counter this, through GISRS surveillance, WHO has been recommending the inclusion of circulating viruses in annual seasonal vaccines since 1973. Since 1998, GISRS has gone a step further and made biannual recommendations for both the northern and southern hemispheres. The most recent recommendation is for the southern hemisphere flu season starting in April 2024, which was made on 29 September 2023. GISRS operates year round, which enables it to function as a global alert mechanism. Together with the Pandemic Influenza Preparedness Framework, which works to improve and strengthen the sharing of influenza viruses with human pandemic potential and to increase the access of developing countries to vaccines and other pandemic related supplies, WHO is keeping an eye on viruses and supporting countries to be better prepared.

The influenza pandemic of 1918 was one of the worst episodes in history, and joined the bubonic plague outbreak of 1346-1353 (known as the Black Death), the HIV/AIDS pandemic, and most recently, the COVID-19 pandemic. Preventing and managing global outbreaks is a constant process, but protecting yourself and others from seasonal influenza is also important. If you're in the higher risk categories listed above and living in the northern hemisphere, do not delay getting vaccinated this autumn. It might save your life. ▀

* Sebastian Zielinski is a Scientific Writer at the World Health Organization (WHO).



© TREATT

Arabic and robusta are the two main types of coffee beans available, but there are other specialty types

A coffee cult

One of the most traded commodities in the world today, coffee has become a necessity not only for people, but also for the economy

Fariza Ahmadova *

It is still unclear how coffee is able to keep its mysteriousness and its allure to this day, being the most popular drink amongst all branches of society. Fashionistas carry it in their trendy mugs, intellectuals use it for inspiration and doctors drink it to stay awake. Coffee has had such a strong influence on our society that even Napoleon Bonaparte's dying wish was to have a last taste of his favorite coffee.

Where did this magnificent plant come from and how was it able to leave such an imprint on cultures through-out the history?

"Open with a joke", they say. In this case, just a fact: over 2.25 billion cups of coffee are drunk daily. The reasons can be endless; staying afloat with daily routines or work schedules, or to have a reason to leave the house and see a friend.

Originally from Ethiopia, coffee has been around for over 1000 years. There is a legend that people started to eat the coffee beans in Ethiopia and loved the feeling of excitement they felt right after, and so they decided to make a beverage out of these plants that they could all drink. Another legend says that a cleric from Yemen visited Ethiopia and when he saw how popular the coffee beverage was, he decided to bring it back to his country and introduce it to the Sufis. Sufis used this drink to stay awake for their religious rituals. At one point, the authorities were concerned about the coffee beverage, as they believed it was intoxicating. However, when they carried out tests, they understood that coffee's effect is quite different to that of alcohol and so it was allowed to spread to the Middle East.

Something even more shocking? Coffee houses were originally a social gathering spot for men. In a way, coffee modernized and revolutionized the traditional custom of living in the Middle East. For the first time, men were able to gather elsewhere besides a mosque.

Turkey was one of the first countries to introduce the coffee house culture. Though coffee houses were once the domain of the Middle Eastern men, in Turkish legend, women had an important role to play in the coffee culture. Throughout the 16th century, coffee fortune telling by women became one of the most famous traditions in Turkey. In Egypt's Alexandria, coffee was a drink preferred by the intellectuals. Egyptian coffee has a cardamom kick to its taste, as opposed to classic coffee in other regions.

The merchants from Turkey (Ottoman Empire), began taking coffee with them to their European trading ports, such as Venice. European countries were so exhilarated by this new discovery, they could not get enough of it. At that point, since coffee was only cultivated in Yemen, they tried to get a hold of coffee beans from there to try and grow in Europe. By the 1970's, the Dutch produced one of the biggest plantations of coffee in Java, the capital of Indonesia. By the 18th century, France were the leading producer and consumer of coffee.

The United States had its own interesting affair with coffee. Revolutionaries decided that the English taxes on tea were too high, and so they proposed to switch to coffee in the 1850s. Moreover, during the American Civil War, the soldiers needed coffee to stay awake, and they began to drink



Do you know that coffee beans are green when first picked?

instant coffee, 'Nescafe', regularly – which is how the popularity of coffee expanded in America. Americans took coffee even further, creating the ever-famous Starbucks in 1987. The popular coffee house expanded to more than 22,000 branches all over the world by 2015.

Finally, while Italy did not discover coffee, they created a coffee machine which boiled the water pushing it through the beans, to create a special kind of coffee called espresso. In doing so, they have created a coffee culture unlike another, claiming this is the best way to consume the beverage.

Coffee houses have since become an intellectual center for poets and artists, where they bounce their ideas with one another. However, the trendy coffee houses we are used to today were quite different back in the day. They were smelly and stuffy, no bigger than a small room. Respectable women would refrain from entering coffee houses, to avoid vulgar conversations. Nonetheless, the popularity of these social gatherings only grew higher.

“Black as hell, strong as death, sweet at love,”- Pasqua Rosee's words, not ours. He was an eccentric Greek servant of the British merchants, known to make the best coffee in the Ottoman Empire. While we may argue that coffee has impacted society in a negative way, spewing addiction and anxiety amongst other disadvantages - we all have our own personal relationship with it. Each of us has our own story about coffee, being told from generation to generation, influencing us in the most mysterious ways. The verdict? Whether you like it or not, paying tribute to it is inevitable. 📌

* Fariza Ahmadova is a UN Today Contributor.

Barbados: a bounty of experiences

Beyond its powder soft, white sand beaches, Barbados has an incredible allure, and an abundance of activities to do all year round

Anita Nightingale *

Contrary to the popular belief that Barbados is exclusively a winter sun haven, the island boasts an enviable roster of year-round activities and experiences, more than any of its Caribbean neighbors.

Opening the year, from January through April, one can enjoy the Barbados polo season. The sport has enjoyed a long history on island, dating back to the 19th century, and today locals and visitors alike can experience the thrill of a few chukkas under idyllic tropical skies, at any of the island's polo estates, including the oldest one located on the Holders Estate on the West Coast.

Remaining in the equestrian vein, Barbados has a rich horse racing heritage. The sport of kings has its home in the island's UNESCO inscribed Historic Garrison Savannah, which outside of races is a

'must explore' site. Here you will find the Barbados Museum and the fascinating George Washington House; the latter being the mansion where the future US President stayed in his youth. The historic track boasts up to 23 race days per year, including the prestigious Boxing Day race, and the world-renowned Sandy Lane Gold Cup, which takes place each March.

For lovers of flora and fauna, Barbados' Horticultural Society hosts a season of Open Garden tours from January through March each year. Visit some of the island's most breathtaking gardens, tucked away in centuries-old sugar estates, or enchanting countryside hamlets. Other gardens on the island that are must-sees include the fabulously curated oasis that is Hunte's Gardens, or the island's only botanical garden, the Andromeda Botanic Gardens, both in St. Joseph.

Beautiful Brighton
Beach, Barbados



As summer begins to advance, Barbados comes alive with events such as the Barbados Surf Pro tournament and Dive Fest. As one of the largest surfing events held in the Caribbean, it is part of the qualifying circuit of the World Surf League tour and is staged on the island's iconic East Coast, at the famed surf break, "The Soup Bowl". The annual Barbados Dive Fest, hosted in July, sees global dive enthusiasts descend on the island to explore its breathtaking undersea realm, while also engaging in a range of conservation and environmental protection workshops.

In the height of summer, visitors to Barbados will be treated to one of the Caribbean's largest festivals, Crop-Over. Historically, this festival was the celebratory end of the sugar harvest, but today, it has evolved to become a vibrant and spellbinding showcase of the island's local music known as soca. Crop-Over launches in May, but peaks in late July – early August. The festival's climax is the Grand Kadooment Day parade, which is held on the first Monday in August. This immense, colourful street party features costumed bands and is an unparalleled opportunity for visitors to see Barbadian (or Bajan) culture up-close, and who knows, you may even spot the island's youngest national hero, Rihanna, on the way!

“ Barbados comes alive with events such as the Barbados Surf Pro tournament and Dive Fest ”

Other popular festivals on the island's calendar include the Barbados Reggae Festival (late April to early May), which features some of the biggest names in the reggae music world, to Barbados Gspelfest (May), which has attracted many global gospel superstars; visitors to the island will be truly spoilt for choice. One of the more intriguing festivals is the Barbados Celtic Festival, an annual music festival which celebrates Barbados' rich Celtic connections.

Apart from Crop-Over, another key festival is the Barbados Food and Rum Festival held in October. With Barbados being the undisputed Culinary Capital of the Caribbean, the marquee event, which showcases the island's incredible gastronomic scene, boasts events starring both local and global culinary luminaries.



Kiters at Silver Sands, South Coast of Barbados

Barbados offers visitors several premium sport activations, which can be enjoyed across the year. In January, there is the annual Barbados Sailing Week, which features the signature 'Round the Island' regatta, while in May, those seeking high-octane thrills can partake in the SOL Rally Barbados "King of the Hill" event, which sees the world's best rally drivers test their mettle on the island's winding courses.

The island features a number of annual fitness competitions and challenges, including the highly anticipated Barbados Adventure Race (BAR), the Barbados National Triathlon (October), the popular Barbados Open Water Swim (November), however, the Run Barbados series (December) is one of the most popular and well-known.

Outside of these events, Barbados has so much to explore and enjoy- its heritage as the birthplace of rum, its UNESCO-inscribed capital city, its many restaurants ranging from fine dining to street food, and its restored population of endangered sea turtles. Barbados, at only 430 square kilometers, truly belies its relatively small size, offering a bounty of quality attractions and experiences that rival cosmopolitan destinations. ▶

* Anita Nightingale writing for Barbados Tourism Marketing Inc.



The illusive struggle to manage 'work' and 'life'

The myth of a 'work-life balance' and how to get it right

Are you feeling torn between work and life? Read the three secrets to harmonizing your career and happiness

Vedant Kulkarni *

Although we say "work-life" balance, work and life are not two different entities. The reason why we separated 'work' and are trying to balance it with 'life' is because we have made:

1. Work = stressful
2. Our working day longer than the time spent for ourselves or with loved ones.

If this is changed, there will be no need to make an effort to 'balance' work with life. How to do that? Here are three secrets:

1. Detach 'work' from stress

Work doesn't have to be stressful if you use these hacks:

I. Use both hemispheres of your brain when at work. We often over-utilize either side of the brain depending on the nature of the work we do. If your work requires more logic and problem-solving, you use your left brain more than your right. An effective way to balance this is to listen to music or do something creative. If you work in an artistic field, you tend to use your right brain more often.

In this case, do some logic-driven tasks, some calculations, or maybe look at your finances more often. Meditation and meditative practices help with whole-brain synchronization and thus help reduce stress, enhance memory, and boost creativity. Having a mid-day meditation (ideally before lunch) can be quite effective and helpful to recharge you for the rest of the day.

II. Spend time with nature even when you are at work. Continuous work without breaks can take a toll on our bodies. Whenever possible, take a ten minute stroll in the nearby park. If your work doesn't allow this, even taking a glimpse at trees out of a window could serve as a good detox.

III. Avoid conflict at work. If there are conflicting situations, be mindful of being kind, compassionate and helpful. Managing your mind and how you feel is the topmost priority. Don't let a tiny issue disturb your poise. Practice showing gratitude and serving selflessly. It pays off in countless ways!

“ Even a glimpse at trees out of a window could serve as a good detox ”

2. Manage time better

Less time wasted means you have more time to do the things you need and want to do. This can be used to spend with yourself or your loved ones. Here are a few ways you can manage your time better:

I. Eliminate junk tasks off the calendar: identify and avoid activities that do not contribute to your goals, such as checking social media, attending to distracting notifications, browsing the internet, or attending unnecessary meetings.

II. Say 'no' skillfully: this is when you are asked or offered something that does not align with your priorities or goals. This means being clear about your reasons and values for saying no, being polite and respectful but firm and assertive, offering an alternative or a compromise if possible, explaining the benefits or consequences of saying no and avoiding guilt-tripping or apologizing excessively. If you do this right, it can save you a ton of time.

III. Use time blocking with dead spaces: divide your day into blocks of time, each dedicated to a

specific task or activity based on your productivity at that time of the day. Include dead spaces: time for yourself, where you can simply recharge or complete tasks that spill over. This can help you prevent burnout, improve your mental health, and boost your creativity and productivity.

These strategies will help you protect your time and energy, and help you avoid overcommitment, resentment, or regret that can affect your well-being or relationships.

3. Make your well-being a priority

Life is like riding a bike. You need to both steer and drive in the right direction with the correct fuel to reach your desired destination. The steering refers to the goals in your life and the fuel is your well-being (physical, mental, social, emotional, and spiritual).

Many of us aspire towards a larger vision, whether it is for ourselves or the global community. We have direction but we often forget to take care of ourselves and our health as we pursue our goals.

The dark side of overworking

Overworking can increase the risk of cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, obesity, insomnia, and other chronic conditions. According to a study by Harvard Business School, working long hours can reduce your ability to generate novel ideas and solutions. Working under high pressure can also impair your cognitive flexibility and divergent thinking. So, by overworking, we are not only failing to work at our optimum capacity but are also damaging our health and our capacity to work.

We should enjoy the journey of reaching our goals, not just the destination. Mental clarity through compartmentalizing work and life will naturally result in a more balanced lifestyle.

With our well-being as a priority, we will naturally want to devote time to exercise, sleep, yoga, meditation, replenish our resources, and spend quality time with loved ones.

In a nutshell

The formula is easy: enjoy your work, manage your time well, and prioritize your well-being. Then, you can experience life at its best, with no more stress about 'balancing' it. ▶

* Vedant Kulkarni is an international Yoga and Meditation teacher.



Witnessing the beauty within, featuring the iconic staircase

Stepping into the culinary limelight

Josh Angus, Group Executive Chef at HIDE in Mayfair, London reveals how he got to the top through hard work and passion for quality ingredients

Mollie Fraser-Andrews *

Overlooking Green Park in the heart of Mayfair, London, HIDE restaurant boasts (alongside its Michelin star) a beautiful hidden exterior, true to its name. It is the workplace of Josh Angus, Group Executive Chef of the three beautiful restaurants in the area - all offering seasonal dishes with a luxurious finish.

Sitting in the comfort of a private dining space entitled 'The Broken Room', located in the basement of HIDE, a culinary sanctuary "to enjoy the imperfect, impermanent and incomplete", Josh reveals how his journey has led him to the culinary heights of his job now.

Starting with the beginning of his career, Josh explains, "I've been a chef for almost 18 years now,

starting off with an apprenticeship in Sheffield one day a week and working in a local restaurant for the rest of the time. I became the Head Chef of two local wine bars before deciding I wanted to train properly. I made the decision to work at Michelin starred Le Manoir, a Raymond Blanc restaurant, which was a rude awakening!". His passions evolved from a young age, after studying Food Technology at school. He described the path he chose was dictated by the feeling of always knowing he wanted to be a chef, as other subjects at school didn't interest him. He states, "The adrenaline and atmosphere of the kitchen was something that really excited me".

A typical day for Josh is as varied as the different dishes they serve. He remarks: "My day to day varies - but as a baseline we do breakfast, lunch



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Josh Angus, Group Executive Chef at HIDE, London

and dinner on both floors of the restaurant. Today we have 160 for breakfast, 90 for lunch and 175 booked for dinner. I'm on the pass ensuring that everything is consistently Michelin starred standard and that I am happy with all the food going out to customers for lunch and dinner. If I have time, I will head to the other sites to check on the Head Chefs, but usually this is done over the phone. Other than that, my day will consist of a lot of admin - rotas, recipes, menu development and recruitment."

When asked about how he motivates the team of around 55 chefs 363 days a year, he says the key is simple. "To inspire the team everyday is about being present, coming in everyday and pushing. By showing them I am working just as hard as them. I also firmly believe in training; we make a lot of our stuff in-house; more than most restaurants. On the premises we have two kitchens and a bakery, where we make everything from our own bread to butchering animals. Not many places do this anymore, and I believe in the art of passing down these skills to the next generation of chefs".

The serenity of HIDE is a testament to the huge operation Josh is running behind the scenes. His staff are hired based on hard work and passion for excellent food. He says the trick to a successful employee is "having the correct attitude and a passion for learning".

HIDE's receptivity to the changing times evolves with the desires of the customer base. Josh says that "HIDE has changed, in that it used to have two restaurants within the one building. We have now streamlined everything to have the same menus on the same floor. For HIDE and myself, we are seasonally led. I like to let the produce speak for itself. Our whole ethos is quite organic and natural - from the food to the plates we use. We create our dishes around what is in season at the time. I believe if you use the best produce and suppliers, then you don't need to do much to make it delicious if you season and cook it well. You have to pay a bit more for this, but it is 100% worth it. With our fish from Cornwall or Scotland, meat from the Lake District and most of our fresh produce from around the United Kingdom, we try and use the best we can."

When asked about the future of dining, he tells me that: "food in restaurants has changed massively in the last ten years, and I think the old school, classical style of cooking is dwindling a bit. Modern European and Scandinavian styles of cooking have become more popular, which is how I like to cook. Taster menus are mostly on the way out, and people normally tend to opt for an à la carte menu, which is what we have noticed here". Unfortunately, with the ongoing financial crisis, Josh says that "everything has gone up in price, which the customer has to pay for too. In recent times, lots of restaurants have closed due to increased wages, inflation and cost of rent - it is a vicious cycle".

So how does HIDE stay afloat when many others are crumbling? Josh says, "We try and offer the full package - our service is amazing, our wine list is the biggest in Europe and we offer a lot of options for different styles of dining." The restaurant's atmosphere is inviting and warm: featuring a magnificent signature staircase akin to something you might see in a Lewis Carroll book; so it is no surprise when Josh reveals: "we have many repeat customers; it becomes a home to many who visit weekly".

If you are in London and fancy a classical meal with a modern twist, a glorious glass of wine from their extensive list or perhaps a tasting menu, one of HIDE's three locations is a guaranteed winner. ▶

* Mollie Fraser-Andrews is the Editorial Coordinator of UN Today.

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