



THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

28 February 2020

Excellency,

I have the honour to refer to the sixty-fourth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, which is scheduled to be held from 9 to 20 March 2020 in New York.

2020 is a landmark year for gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. The global community is celebrating the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women and the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action – the most progressive blueprint for advancing women’s rights. The importance of this anniversary is evident through the extensive national, regional and global preparatory activities conducted by Member States and other stakeholders.

The foregoing notwithstanding, we must take into account the advice from the World Health Organization with regard to the global Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) situation, including the transmission dynamics in various locations; the future likely spread of the virus; the reliance on physical measures for prevention – as there is no vaccine currently available; and the very large number of people from across the globe expected to participate in official meetings.

We must therefore anticipate the implications for all forthcoming intergovernmental meetings at Headquarters and elsewhere, which will need to be assessed on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the specificities of the meeting and evolving circumstances. The sixty-fourth session of the Commission will be the first meeting to be held at Headquarters for which a decision needs to be taken imminently.

After careful consideration, and on the basis of the advice of relevant departments within the Secretariat, I wish to suggest that Member States consider amending the format and conduct of the session. Options could include holding a scaled-down, shortened session, which would enable the Commission to still implement its mandate and mark the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary. Another possibility would be postponing the session to a later date, although that choice would pose significant challenges in light of the heavy calendar of conferences for 2020.

His Excellency
Mr. Mher Margaryan
Chair – Commission on the Status of Women
Permanent Representative of the Republic
of Armenia to the United Nations
New York

Given the manner in which the situation surrounding COVID-19 is rapidly developing, including the increasing number of travel restrictions, and mindful of the need to balance the continuation of essential activities with the protection of public health, I am recommending that Member States decide to shorten and scale down the session. I would strongly recommend that capital-based representatives refrain from travelling to Headquarters for the session. In the same vein, it would be prudent for the Secretariat and Member States to cancel all side events.

It would be important for Member States to take a decision as soon as possible, so that government delegations and other stakeholders may adjust their plans accordingly.

My colleagues and I stand ready to support the Commission in its final decision and in any other proposal that Member States may wish to explore for the organization of the session.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.

with my warmest personal regards



António Guterres