

Special Event

Women Leadership in Disaster Risk Reduction

Wednesday 25 May, 13:00-17:00, Arena E, Moon Palace Resort

Message by Ms. Tarja Halonen, former President of Finland

Dear Deputy Secretary-General Mohamed, dear SRS Glasser, Excellencies, dear delegates and colleagues,

I apologize I'm unable to attend this important Special Event on Women Leadership in Disaster Risk Reduction today due the launch of the Report of the High Level Working Group on Health and Human Rights in Geneva which I am Co-Chairing. I am however pleased to join you through this message to discuss the important issue of women leadership in DRR.

Though significant efforts were made over the past decades in promoting women leadership and empowerment in disaster risk reduction, too many women are still being seen as victims from disasters and their actual contributions and potential to disaster risk reduction, their leadership and central role in building disaster risk reduction and resilience strategies remain too often underestimated and untapped.

Women are too often absent from the development of disaster risk reduction strategies and decision-making processes and when present, their voices are seldom heard. The fact that women are often under-represented in politics is a clear indication of their absence in the development of national priorities, including those related to disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation. Only 22.8 per cent of all national parliamentarians were women as of June 2016, a slow increase from 11.3 per cent in 1995.

The Sendai Framework is supporting an all-inclusive approach to disaster risk reduction that recognizes women's indispensable role in risk reduction efforts and encourage Governments to promote women's full, equal and effective participation and leadership in the design, management, resourcing and implementation of gender-sensitive disaster risk reduction policies, plans and programmes.

The 2017 Global Platform will mark the first opportunity after the adoption of the Sendai Framework 2015-2030 to take stock of progress in its implementation and to adopt a new vision and innovative approach to accelerate efforts in building communities and nations' resilience to disasters. It is therefore critical to use the 2017 Global Platform to address the gender gaps in policy setting, technical capacity and expertise and in resourcing gender-sensitive disaster risk reduction.

I was very pleased to see the recognition of gender as a key priority in scaling up efforts in implementing the Sendai Framework on the occasion of the European Forum for DRR (October 2016, Finland) and the adoption of detailed guidelines to promote a gender-sensitive implementation of the Sendai Framework at the 2016 Regional Asia-Pacific Conference on Gender and Disaster Risk Reduction in Hanoi, Vietnam. Further political commitment and resource mobilization efforts are now needed to implement and scale up these regional successes at all levels.

We only have two years to develop practical and innovative approaches to accelerate the implementation of the Sendai Framework and meet the Target of increasing national and local strategies for disaster risk reduction by 2020. The next Global Platform will be too late. It is therefore urgent to put our strategic priorities right. The time has come to foster a drastic strategic change of orientation on the way we want to meet the global priorities of the Sendai Framework and the SDGs by 2030. One of them must be on “genderizing disaster risk reduction” as a solid contribution to shaping a safer, more resilient and sustainable future for the next generations.

I therefore urge Governments to integrate gender dimensions as part of their national and local strategies by 2020 as called for by the Sendai Framework. This includes to promote education and capacity-building in DRR from the younger ages to build our DRR leaders of tomorrow. This also requires immediate action by Governments to systematically collect and report progress against sex, age and disability data to keep track on women’s needs and achievements in disaster risk reduction and build inclusive disaster risk reduction strategies. Without this, women’s challenges and needs will remain unaddressed and their contribution to making their communities safer and resilient to disasters will remain invisible. This finally requires Governments’ systematic commitment and action to include women in the design, planning, programming and resourcing of disaster risk reduction strategies and to engage them actively in disaster risk reduction governance and decision-making.

I thank you for your attention and wish you fruitful discussions and conclusions that I hope we can take forward to achieve the required transformations at all levels towards a safer and more equitable world for all by 2030.