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On 8 March, the world celebrates International Women’s Day. The hashtag for 2019 is #balanceforbetter, and this edition opens with an article examining gender balance within the United Nations: from the Secretariat, to heads of agencies. We profile H.E. Mrs. Nazhat Shameem Khan, Ambassador of Fiji; Ms. Isabelle Durant, Deputy Secretary-General of UNCTAD; and Dr. Renata Dwan, Director of UNIDIR. As leaders in their respective institutions, these women share their thoughts and experiences on gender equality and leadership at large. This edition also enquires into the issue of equal access to healthcare, a pressing matter for many women around the globe.

We offer you a leading line up of interviews with distinguished leaders of International Geneva, H.E. Mr. Ali Al-Mansouri, Ambassador of Qatar shares his perspectives on the work of his diplomatic mission and on the position of women in Qatari society. We also speak with Mr. Jos Verbeek, head of the World Bank Group Geneva Office, about the engagements of the World Bank. Finally, we bring you the third instalment of an inside account of the negotiation process behind the 2030 Agenda, as told by UN Assistant Secretary-General Mr. Nikhil Seth, one of its intellectual creators.

Also in this edition: we speak with H.E. Mr. Henri Monceau, Ambassador of the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie, a feature on the 2,800th anniversary of the city of Yerevan, Armenia, and invitations to attend the upcoming International Film Festival and Forum on Human Rights (FIFDH). We invite you to enjoy this issue.

On 8 mars, le monde célèbre la Journée internationale de la femme. Le hashtag pour 2019 est #balanceforbetter, et cette édition commence par un article sur la parité au sein des Nations Unies: du Secrétariat aux chefs des agences. Nous y présentons aussi S. E. Mme Shameem Khan, Ambassadeur de Fidji, Mme Isabelle Durant, Secrétaire générale adjointe de la CNUCED, et Dr Renata Dwan, Directrice de l’UNIDIR. En tant que dirigeantes dans leurs institutions respectives, ces femmes partagent leurs réflexions et expériences sur l’égalité des sexes et le leadership. Cette édition examine également la question de l’égalité d’accès aux soins de santé.


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BAYERISCHE MOTOREN WERKE

Emil Frey SA
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Why hasn’t 50/50 gender balance been achieved yet in the UN?

Reproductive rights, equal pay, and the right not to experience harassment or assault are issues central to women’s rights. However, another impactful matter that is often overlooked is gender balance in the workplace. Gender balance in the workplace is an incredibly important issue and it should be the priority of organizations to achieve it in order to advance the rights of women.

The UN identified the importance of attaining gender balance over 20 years ago in 1996 when a General Assembly (GA) resolution called for “overall gender equality, particularly at the professional level and above, by the year 2000.” However, the goal of gender balance is one that the UN seems to have brushed to one side, as it has been almost 20 years since the original deadline and gender balance has still not been achieved. It was expressed in a 2017 GA resolution that there was “serious concern” about progress towards the 50/50 goal. This resolution also emphasized the importance of the UN Strategy on Gender Parity stating that the intention of the Secretary-General “to implement a comprehensive strategy to intensify efforts to ensure greater representation of women in the Secretariat, particularly in senior leadership positions” was welcomed. Time and time again, the UN makes statements and resolutions about achieving gender balance for women in the workplace, and although there has been some progress towards this goal, the UN is still falling short.

Gender imbalance in the UN, and by extension the UN common system

For internationally recruited staff, the United Nations current staff body is 39% female. In some agencies, the percentage of female staff is as low as 20%. The current UN Strategy on Gender Parity, “sets targets and monitors the following areas: leadership and accountability; senior management; recruitment and retention; creating an enabling environment; and mission settings.” The strategy also states that it is the United Nation’s goal to reach gender parity, meaning 50% females and 50% males in senior leadership positions, by 2030. This goal is extremely important to the advancement of the UN, however, if it is to be achieved, major changes must be implemented.

All UN Secretary-Generals have been male. Additionally, the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC), a body that mandates employment conditions for international civil servants, has always been headed by a male and is currently an 86.67% male commission. If the UN truly wants to make progress in gender balance, the selections of Secretary-General and members of the ICSC Commission must be examined.
Secretary-General and Executive Heads of the UN Common System

The office of Secretary-General is the highest and most influential post in the United Nations system. The office has always been held by men. Although a variety of nationalities have been represented, no woman has ever held the office. The General Assembly continues to pass resolutions calling for gender parity, but it is the Assembly itself that has not yet elected a woman to the highest UN office.

The issue of gender balance is not isolated to the UN Secretariat, but is problematic in the entire UN common system. An examination of the gender of the executive heads of the 28 organizations belonging to the UN common system, including the UN Secretariat, reveals that 75% are men versus 25% females. This is another area where improvements must be made to achieve gender balance.

International Civil Service Commission

Perhaps an even more worrying issue is the paltry number of women in the Commission, a body which has the responsibility to “regulate and coordinate the conditions of service for the United Nations common system staff.” The Commission is composed of 15 commissioners, 13 of whom are men. Members of the Commission are appointed by the UN General Assembly.

The Chairman of the Commission is responsible for appointing members to the Advisory Committee on Post Adjustment Questions (ACPAQ), after consulting with the Executive Heads of the organizations and the staff federations. This committee is responsible for calculating and advising the Commission on post adjustment. Post adjustment is an amount added to net base salary, in order to ensure that no matter what duty station United Nations common system staff work in, their net remuneration has a purchasing power equivalent to that of their counterparts in New York City, the base of the system. Therefore, the work which the ACPAQ does is extremely influential and relevant to the lives of international civil servants. This Committee is composed entirely of men and has been since its establishment.

Like the position of Secretary-General, the members of the Commission and ACPAQ represent a diverse set of nationalities. This, however, does not rectify the fact that women are severely underrepresented in these bodies. How can we expect the decisions of these groups to be well-rounded when women make up only a combined 10% of these two ICSC bodies?

The Value of Women in the Workplace

Many excuses for the underrepresentation of women in the workplace come from the flawed ideology that women are simply not up for the task. However, a research study completed by Hive, an efficiency management company, explains that women are 10% more productive in the workplace than men. Their data shows that women complete more work largely due to the fact that they are, on average, assigned 54.9% of the tasks compared to men who are assigned 45.1%. Both women and men complete on average, 66% of the tasks that are assigned to them.

Another study conducted by McKinsey and Company, a global management and consulting firm, and Lean In, a nonprofit company dedicated to helping women achieve their ambitions, displayed the worth of women at work when they examined all aspects of women’s roles in the modern workplace. This in-depth study

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28 total
7 women (25%)
reviewed 279 companies and surveyed 64,000 employees in their research on women in the workplace.

In this study, a variety of factors that contribute to inequality are examined, as well as common practices of women in the workplace. The study stated, “What sets these women apart is their strong belief that they are making a difference, their ability to turn adversity into learning opportunities, their persistence in building relationships with sponsors and others, their willingness to step outside their comfort zones, and the positive energy that comes with loving their work.” Especially in an organization like the UN, which is solely focused on improving the world for all, having employees who have an elevated passion for what they do is especially advantageous.

On a positive note, there is some progress

Although women are still way underrepresented in the UN, progress, albeit at a snail’s pace, has been made toward equal representation. For example, the current President of the UN General Assembly is María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés of Ecuador. Ms. Espinosa Garcés began her term as President of the 73rd session in September of 2018 and is the fourth female President of the UN General Assembly, and the first since 2006. Another example is the current Executive Director of UN Women, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka of South Africa. She has been serving in this position since August of 2013, and is one of few black women to be elected as Executive Head of any UN common system organization.

Conclusion

Women allow for a more diverse, well-rounded workplace as well as contributing more to their organizations, as the above-referenced studies demonstrate. The United Nations, specifically the countries belonging to it, must cast the right vote to ensure that women are equally represented in some of its most influential bodies, like the position of Secretary-General and in the ICSC and its subsidiary committees, in order to achieve gender balance. The votes needed to get women to the top positions of the entire common system rest solely with the voting member states. It is therefore fervently hoped that member states are guided to take the moral high ground and do the right thing. It is time.

References:
1. WHO Staff who is the outgoing General Secretary of the Federation of International Civil Servants’ Association (FICSA)
2. FICSA intern from Baldwin Wallace University
3. WIPO Staff who is currently serving at FICSA President
4. A/RES/71/263, item 3
5. A/RES.71.263, item 19
6. A/RES.71.263, item 20
7. UN Secretariat Gender Parity Dashboard; International Staff, Overall Balance and by Entity - https://www.un.org/gender/content/un-secretariat-gender-parity-dashboard
12. “State of the Workplace, Part 1: Gender” page 8

Les compagnies de Star Alliance, Air Canada, SWISS et United Airlines vous proposent des vols directs au départ de Genève vers trois grandes villes d’Amérique du Nord.
Isabelle Durant was appointed Deputy Secretary-General of UNCTAD in July 2017. She is a former Minister and Senator of Belgium and served as Vice-President of the European Parliament from 2009 to 2014. On the occasion of International Women’s Day, she shares her thoughts with UN Special readers on being a woman in high office in 2019.

SARAH JORDAN, DEPUTY EDITOR

You are an example of a woman who has broken through the glass ceiling. At what moment in your career do you consider you entered territories rarely trodden by women? I agree that the glass ceiling exists for a lot of minorities and especially women (who are not a minority, but half the world!), but when I reflect on my career, I was never conscious of breaking through it. I passed through it naturally. My mother was one of the first women doctors in Belgium after the Second World War and although I never discussed this with her, I guess she also did this naturally. No doubt, I am like her! In my family, boys and girls had equal possibilities and were encouraged to go to university. It was and it is natural for me to have a career. I did not have to make any special efforts, but the stars were well aligned for me. I remember one day at the beginning of my political career, in 1994. I received a call asking me to become Co-President of my party and was told my answer was needed the next day. This post required me to take on a lot of responsibility and work in another city in Belgium, leaving my husband and family during the week… I realised that this was a chance not to be missed and that such an opportunity would not come my way again, so I discussed it with my husband and children and accepted. This was a key moment in my trajectory, but it was more about decisively entering the world of politics than about entering a man’s world. Co-presidency of the Ecologist Party in Belgium is always shared between a man and a woman so it was a good place to start. Later on, when I became Transport Minister, I really did enter a man’s world: dealing with railway workers, airline pilots and lorry drivers. I remember a strike with about 500 men outside my office – well-built, straight talking men – it wasn’t easy to calm the situation. They were lorry drivers, who had blocked access to the city with their vehicles, and dockers, who vigorously opposed a project to liberalise the ports. Another time, I was on a train and a picket of railway workers stopped it because they wanted to talk to me. As a woman and an ecologist, I wasn’t really their cup of tea – but they realized I was ready to listen to them and find solutions. When you know your dossier and succeed in such a situation, being a woman can actually be an advantage – and there was humour and human- ity in our exchanges.

What are your tips to women in middle management who want to advance? A woman needs to ask herself what is best for her. It depends on the area in which she works and what she needs to feel good at that time. Is she seeking to boost her self-confidence or gain recognition? Where is the best place for her to find this? A career is not linear. Both sexes would benefit from more flexibility. An international career is particularly difficult because of the absence of family help and this should be taken into account. I was lucky to be able to accomplish the first half of my career in my country of origin. It was easier for me than it is for internationals.

And what about the sacrifices? I don’t like the word sacrifice – it implies that your career has cost you something and if that’s the case it’s not a good career. Compromise, letting certain things go, yes; domestic power at home, for example, or leisure activities. These are choices. When a woman, or a man for that matter, stops work to look after children or ageing parents, it’s a decision that should be valued. You can learn a lot from adapting to young children or old people or working in a team. These are experiences that can teach you skills that might be more useful in the workplace than a PhD – or at least as useful!

And for those who are less ambitious and just want a good work/life balance? It’s not a question of being less ambitious; it’s a question of having a different ambition. There is nothing wrong with wanting to look after one’s family or to do the things you like – just find what makes you happy! Working 60 hours a week is not happiness for everybody. I like this – but others don’t. For me, my lives merge: politics, work, friends, family… but others don’t necessarily want this. And that’s perfectly OK. Ambition is personal – but it is important. The type of “killer” ambition often
found in politics, with the collateral damage it implies, is not an objective for me, nor should it be an objective for Society. I advocate a softer ambition. Alliances, collegiality and collective intelligence. With more horizontal management structures and parity, both men and women stand to gain at all levels of the hierarchy... and the Secretary-General, Mr. Guterres, has recognised this.

What are the challenges and satisfactions of being a woman in 2019 (#MeToo)? #MeToo has allowed women to express themselves on violence and has opened the dialogue. This is a good thing. A woman’s path is not easy, for sure, but they are more united than men and, dare I say it, more courageous. They multi-task, they have many pots on the boil and their multiple satisfactions nourish each other. However, I do think young men face some difficult issues in today’s world. They are not the only ones to have access to high positions anymore; quotas even bar their path. Social media connects the world meaning young men can discover behaviours that are different to theirs. This can open their minds, or it can radicalise them. In violent societies, young men are often lost; they are violent to themselves and to each other. Yet paradoxically men are often more fragile than women and today they are questioning many things. Society needs to help them too.

Everything you have said to me today is very positive. Is optimism one of the characteristics that guides you? If you look at things optimistically, it helps – you don’t choose to be an optimist or a pessimist – you’re born the way you are – but one can cultivate optimism. It’s also the ability to pick yourself up after a difficult moment, and we all have difficult moments in life, be they personal or professional. Bouncing back from a failure or transforming suffering into something positive is empowering. In my previous career as a nurse, I worked with Nobel Prize winner Dr. Denis Mukwege who is working to end rape as a weapon of war worldwide. In his hospital in Bukavu in the Democratic Republic of Congo, I met women who were victims of such crimes. Their courage and resilience was inspiring. If you can bounce back from things like that, you can bounce back from anything. Their stories put things into perspective and I draw strength from this.

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INTERVIEW

Gender equality, we should move from the rhetoric to effective work

Her Excellency Mrs. Nazhat Shameem Khan was appointed Fiji’s first Permanent Representative to the United Nations in Geneva in May 2014. On the occasion of International Women’s Day, we interviewed her to share with our readers her thoughts and hopes for her country and human rights globally.

SARAH BENCHERIF, UNOG
First of all, you were prosecutor in Fiji for 16 years, you were appointed Fiji’s first female High Court judge and you continue to conduct training for judges in Fiji on human rights and criminal justice. Tell us more about yourself and your career?
I was initially educated in Fiji and then moved to the United Kingdom where I attended Sussex and Cambridge universities. I returned to Fiji in 1983 and worked for the Office of the DPP as a prosecutor. I became the DPP in 1994, until I was appointed a judge of the High Court in 1999. I believe that lawyers need to keep reminding themselves that their most important role is that of providing access to justice to society. Understanding the law in the context of society, recognising the role of the criminal justice system from the point of view of those who have limited legal literacy and limited access to the courts, is crucial for the lawyer. This belief continues to guide my work as an ambassador of Fiji to the UN. The work of translating the Geneva agenda to the lives of people in Fiji means engaging the legal and judicial system. We are very fortunate in Fiji to have a strong and progressive Bill of Rights in our Constitution which specifically empowers judges to use international law to interpret it. The training I do with the judges in Fiji helps them to identify sources of rights, developments in the interpretation of those rights and the way in which those rights have been interpreted in domestic courts around the world. Judges draw upon judicial opinion around the world and are capable of rising above sectarian and narrow social boundaries to effect aspirational change.

What are the overall objectives and goals for Fiji and for you as the ambassador in Geneva?
Fiji has become a member of the Human Rights Council for the first time this year. In addition, Fiji is honoured to be a Vice President of the Council for 2019. Our first objective is to ensure that we respect and honour the voluntary pledges we made when we campaigned for a seat on the Council. One of these pledges is to support the mechanisms of the Council, intended to promote respect for human rights globally. Another is to work towards the recognition of the human right to a clean and safe environment. The relationship between people and the environment is crucial. Change is mandatory for all of us, in the way we think about the environment and the way we treat it. Change is ineffective without people, and as with all change, the vulnerable become more vulnerable unless we empower them. Work towards a closer relationship between people and the environment and work to drive a human rights approach to climate adaptation and mitigation are other priorities. We will also work harder at implementing rights in Fiji. Our Universal Periodic Review is scheduled for November this year and this valuable process allows us to look critically at our own human rights record, the promises we named at our last review and the progress we have made in implementing rights domestically. Our presence in Geneva only makes sense if it helps to drive substantive equality, and an understanding of the balancing of different rights, at home in Fiji.

You are a distinguished justice practitioner. Please tell us more about climate justice and why gender needs to be at the heart of climate action?
I have grown up in a patriarchal society. From the day I was born, I was told by many of my relatives to speak as little as possible, to refrain from expressing my opinion unless asked and that ultimately I would be judged not by the excellence of my submissions in court but by the excellence of
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my cooking and cleaning skills. I know what it is like to try to maintain dignity in a room full of hostile people who judge you as a woman and not as a professional. I know that in many community meetings women are invisible. Thus, when I began to look at climate change and the way it requires us to work on an agenda we have never considered necessary in the past, such as responding to frequent disasters or relocating entire communities because of rising sea levels, I realised, as many people have realised, that these events will further marginalise women if we do not specifically make women visible and involved in the process. Climate change has forced change on us. We cannot perpetuate the inequalities of the past because the effectiveness of climate action depends on the involvement of all members of society and inclusivity ensures the empowerment of the most disempowered and ensures substantive equality. After all, the foundation of a true democracy is equality. Climate action too, must be action which is driven by people who are enabled and empowered by governments. This belief is what has inspired my work on climate change.

Your Excellency is the newly appointed Vice president of the Human Rights Council and it is the first time for Fiji or any Pacific state to sit on it. How do you intend to use this position to strengthen climate action?

I would like to see more discourse on the relationship between climate change and human rights. More Universal Periodic Review questions and recommendations on climate action which integrates the rights of all people in climate policies. I would like to see human rights as an accepted norm for all work within the United Nations on climate change, and more women, children and people from vulnerable groups such as marginalised indigenous communities on mainstream climate change panels and work programmes. I would also like to hear more discussion on the difficult relationship between cultural practices and human rights. This is a vexing subject in the Pacific and can only be constructively dealt with in fora like the Human Rights Council. Which is another reason why I would like to see all Pacific Island states represented in Geneva. The OHCHR LDCs/ SIDS Trust Fund work in bringing the Pacific and other SIDS and LDCs to Geneva is therefore invaluable.

As a gender champion, what are the most important actions the UN should undertake to empower women and actively address gender equality?

I think we should move from the rhetoric to effective work. It is a wonderful first start for chairs of assemblies to declare that assemblies should have zero tolerance of harassment and bullying, but we need to bite the bullet now and have an agreed definition of what constitutes harassment in the workplace. Such definitions should protect those who are not employees of the UN but who are attending UN meetings. There is a gap in policy work in this regard. I feel very heartened to see so many women in the UN system but even more heartened when more women survive the system to be appointed to high positions. The fact that women are still under represented in many agencies at the management level, indicates inequalities in the employment practices of those agencies. It is this area which requires the hardest work and, incidentally, encounters the greatest opposition to change. One of the greatest fallacies of work place equality is that equality means treating everyone in the same way irrespective of historical gender and other disadvantage.

To conclude: What do you have to say to young women at the UN and in diplomacy? What is your advice for them?

I would say what my parents always told me. Be strong, be resolute and believe in yourselves. There will be moments in your career when you begin to doubt your own ability, your own integrity and your own character because you see the judgement and contempt on the faces of your peers and managers around you. I will not tell you that this will end or that your moments of self-doubt will one day disappear miraculously. However, I will say that the best path to your own personal success as a woman is the ability to survive with your integrity intact and to be guided by your own conscience and the knowledge you have acquired in your careers. I would also say that all woman who have suffered discrimination understand well how such discrimination translates into unequal work practices. We should never forget what such discrimination felt like and, when we become leaders and managers ourselves, we should do our best to reform work places to remove the institutional bias which restricts the advancement of women on an equal basis with men.
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<td>COSY NEST OF 3 ROOMS</td>
<td>New building / Attic / 78 m² + balcony of 6 m² / Living room giving access to the balcony / Open kitchen / Bedroom / Bathroom / Outside parking / Smin by walk from the Lake.</td>
<td>CHF 790’000.- (Ref. 30321)</td>
<td>Nathalie Assir, <a href="mailto:assir@comptoir-immo.ch">assir@comptoir-immo.ch</a></td>
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<td>New building / Attic / 78 m² + balcony of 6 m² / Living room giving access to the balcony / Open kitchen / Bedroom / Bathroom / Outside parking / Smin by walk from the Lake.</td>
<td>CHF 2‘090’000.- (Ref. 27675)</td>
<td>Alain Auberson, <a href="mailto:auberson@comptoir-immo.ch">auberson@comptoir-immo.ch</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:auberson@comptoir-immo.ch">auberson@comptoir-immo.ch</a></td>
<td>+41 (0)22 365 99 99</td>
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<tr>
<td>FOUNEX (VD)</td>
<td>CHARMING 3 ROOMS</td>
<td>Bright / 5th floor / 75 m² PPE / Living room / Kitchen / Bedroom / Bathroom / Balcony 8 m² / Cellar / Close to the International Organizations, shops and transports.</td>
<td>CHF 795’000.- (Ref. 30050)</td>
<td>Eric Fino, <a href="mailto:fino@comptoir-immo.ch">fino@comptoir-immo.ch</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:fino@comptoir-immo.ch">fino@comptoir-immo.ch</a></td>
<td>+41 (0)22 319 88 05</td>
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<tr>
<td>MONTREUX (VD)</td>
<td>EXCLUSIVITY – 4.5 ROOMS VILLA</td>
<td>Villa on 3 floors / Fantastic view / Bright / Living room / Chimney / 2 larges terraces / 3 bedrooms / Possibility to create an extra bedroom / 1 garage / 1 covered parking space.</td>
<td>CHF 1‘100’000.- (Ref. 30576)</td>
<td>Geneviève Iglesias, <a href="mailto:iglesias@comptoir-immo.ch">iglesias@comptoir-immo.ch</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:iglesias@comptoir-immo.ch">iglesias@comptoir-immo.ch</a></td>
<td>+41 (0)21 966 23 35</td>
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<tr>
<td>VILLETTE (VD)</td>
<td>VILLA OF 4.5 ROOMS 150M²</td>
<td>Privileged situation / Rare waterfront property / View of the lake and the Alps / Direct access to the lake / boat garage / 1 garage / 1 outdoor parking space.</td>
<td>Price upon request (Ref. 30540)</td>
<td>Geneviève Iglesias, <a href="mailto:iglesias@comptoir-immo.ch">iglesias@comptoir-immo.ch</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:iglesias@comptoir-immo.ch">iglesias@comptoir-immo.ch</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>SIERRE (VS)</td>
<td>NEW PROMOTION</td>
<td>Studio to 4.5 rooms / Downtown / Delivery June 2019 / Special offer for investors - Rent guarantee offered during the 1st year! See conditions in our agency.</td>
<td>From CHF 205’000.- (Ref. 30660)</td>
<td>Angela Werlen, <a href="mailto:werlen@comptoir-immo.ch">werlen@comptoir-immo.ch</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:werlen@comptoir-immo.ch">werlen@comptoir-immo.ch</a></td>
<td>+41 (0) 27 452 23 03</td>
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<tr>
<td>SIERRE (VS)</td>
<td>IDEAL FOR INVESTMENT</td>
<td>4.5 rooms / 100 m² / Residential area / Gross yield: 4.74% / Close to public transport / 4 minutes drive from the city center and its shops.</td>
<td>CHF 385’000.- (Ref. 28443)</td>
<td>Benoît Dorsaz, <a href="mailto:dorsaz@comptoir-immo.ch">dorsaz@comptoir-immo.ch</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:dorsaz@comptoir-immo.ch">dorsaz@comptoir-immo.ch</a></td>
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WHO has been working closely with the Government of Nigeria to better understand how and when young people seek health services. The study showed that in parts of Northern Nigeria, girls and women are not allowed to leave their homes without a chaperone, preventing them from accessing services when male family members do not approve, or do see their health needs as a priority. Furthermore, it was revealed that women are unable to interact with male health workers who do not have any family connection as this is considered socially unacceptable.

A similar assessment was made in Tanzania, which revealed that adolescent boys and men were less inclined to seek sexual and reproductive health services because they assumed these were only provided for girls and women. The study also highlighted the challenges faced by many adolescent girls proposing the use of condoms with their male partners.

Discussions on gender and health tend to primarily revolve around women’s health concerns. But women and girls are seldom included in political discussions and decisions concerning their health. Furthermore, they face greater barriers to health information and services due to economic dependence, patriarchal structure and domestic roles. Women more often work in informal occupations, earn less, and carry the vast share of unpaid care work, resulting in a lack of social protection or entitlement to insurance schemes. They often have limited influence over the allocation of resources, while having greater needs of services, such as for cervical and breast cancer prevention and treatment, or services related to reproduction that count for the high morbidity and mortality in women. In addition, one in three women experiences violence during her lifetime, with serious implications on her physical, sexual, reproductive and mental health.

Growing evidence over the past decade in recognizing sex and gender as critical determinants of health.

While it is important to address the specific concerns of women, a growing appreciation of gender as a social determinant has triggered an interest to also study how men, including non-heterosexual and trans men, suffer from hegemonic
Focus group discussion with boys from rural areas in Konduga, Borno State

gender norms and notions of masculinity.

Although men continue to benefit from a greater degree of socio-economic power and privilege by virtue of their gender, the rigid norms and notions of masculinities have harmful effects on men too. Combined with other societal and individual factors, traditional masculinity increases their vulnerability to serious health risks, and makes them less inclined to seek health care when needed. This results in poorer health, demonstrated by the higher rate of premature mortality across the life course. This in turn can also negatively affect women. The ill-health of a male member of the family in many cases means an increased burden of care on women. Disability or death of a male family member can drive the household into poverty, increasing women’s burden of responsibility for providing for the family.

The American Psychological Association published in 2018 its first-ever Guidelines for Psychological Practice With Boys and Men, complementing Guidelines for Girls and Women, providing compelling evidence on the negative health implications of the dominant ideal of masculinity for men and boys. The guidelines also underline the critical implications of traditional masculinity on the health of gender non-conforming and non-heterosexual individuals, who frequently face discrimination in health care, hostility in the society, and are at greater risk for mental ill-health, including depression and suicide attempts. Transgender persons are often ostracized for defying traditional binary gender norms and pushed to the margins of the society, and are also more frequently subject to physical and sexual violence.

Thus, breaking down gender stereotypes and addressing harmful notions of masculinity benefits not just men. Women and gender-diverse individuals gain both directly and indirectly through the reduction of sexist and homo- and trans-phobic attitudes.

The health of women, men and gender non-conforming individuals are inextricably linked. As a critical determinant of health, gender concerns us all. We do need to challenge gender stereotypes and remove gender-related barriers to healthcare. Gender-sensitive policies need to be translated into gender transformative programmes and a gender-responsive health system to ensure health for all.
The 17th edition of the International Film Festival and Forum on Human Rights (FIFDH) will take place from 8–17 March 2019 with its inspirational Director, Isabelle Gattiker at the helm for the 5th time.

Isabelle Gattiker, Director of the FIFDH

with the main session of the UN Human Rights Council. However, the FIFDH works all year round and in 2018 you launched the Human Rights Film Tour. Can you tell me more about this?
The Human Rights Film Tour was a big tour to celebrate the 70th anniversary of The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and raise awareness. It opened in Islamabad and closed in Cairo with stopovers in places such as Guatemala and Zimbabwe along the way! We screened films co-produced by Switzerland and hosted thematic events in 42 different countries. We have already received funding from the Department of Foreign Affairs and the Canton of Geneva for the 2019 Tour, which will be smaller, with 15 countries.

What is new for FIFDH 2019?
With an ever more complex programme, we needed a new web site. The old one was designed for 50 events and now we have more than 200. We have refreshed the graphics and improved navigation with better search tools. It’s always a challenge to find the right image for the Festival, but we are happy with the 2019 poster, which is both intimate and universal, designed by a young South-African photographer and anthropologist, Zuko Wonderfull Sikafungana. Every year we invite an artist for a three-month residency and for 2019 it is the Franco-Algerian photographer, Bruno Boudjelal. His project, co-presented by the City of Meyrin and Agence VU, is entitled “We will not die tired” and involved interviewing people seeking refuge in the Canton. For each subject two photos will be exhibited – a portrait of the refugee, an object that helped them survive and a short text to summarise their story.

The opening of the FIFDH often coincides with International Women’s Day – and our March issue of UN Special always focuses on this theme. What do you have in store for us this year?
On March 8, the opening film On Her Shoulders pays homage to women human rights defenders and Nobel Peace Prize winner, Nadia Murad. Michelle Bachellet, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, will speak at the official opening ceremony. In parallel, we will have a debate moderated by the BBC’s Lyse Doucet with three human rights defenders, Hajer Sharief (Libya), Tatiana Pechonchyk (Ukraine) and Sareta Ashraph (Iraq), who will highlight the obstacles encountered in their daily struggles. Continuing on the theme of women, on March 9, in partnership with the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, we will screen A Dark Place, followed by a debate on women journalists and the cyber harassment of which they are a prime target. Journalist Nadia Daam

Sarah Jordan: In an interview published in la Tribune de Genève on 30 April 2018, the Canton of Geneva said that the FIFDH was now as emblematic of Geneva as the jet d’eau or the Flower Clock. How does that make you feel?
Isabelle Gattiker: Well we certainly weren’t expecting it! The Canton conducted many interviews with actors from different sectors and published a report on multiculturalism and how to rebrand Geneva as an international city. They announced their findings on the very day of my 40th birthday! They suggested four new emblems of International Geneva including the FIFDH, symbolising the city’s commitment to human rights. To be singled out in this way is a great honour, of course, but also a big responsibility. Such an accolade put us under pressure for the 2019 edition.

What kind of pressure?
We cannot rest on our laurels – we need to rethink every edition as if it were the first. But today everything is ready and this edition is like we dreamed it would be; not just the artists, activists and celebrities we will receive, but some very topical themes and venues including prisons and migrant centres… Sixty-two locations in total in Greater Geneva and French-speaking Switzerland. We need to consider many aspects when planning the Festival. Selecting committed films is becoming more and more challenging with less funding available. Traditional TV channels, with the exception of RTS and ARTE, are producing less and viewing habits are changing. We have two films produced by Netflix for the first time this year. The Boy who Harnessed the Wind is a 2019 British drama film written, directed by and starring Chiwetel Ejiofor (Twelve Years a Slave) in his feature directorial debut. The Edge of Democracy, a very challenging, complex, feature-length documentary focuses on the rise and fall of Dilma Rousseff, former President of Brazil. We hope that Netflix and others will invest more and more in films like this in the future, but also continue working with Festivals and cinemas, so that these films can be watched on the big screen.

The Festival is a very intensive 10-day event that coincides with the 5th time.

INTERVIEW
Isabelle Gattiker, Director of the FIFDH

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(Slate.fr and Arte) was the first woman to win a court case against such harassers and she will participate in the debate. Two women preside over our international juries: the novelist and Goncourt prizewinner, Leïla Slimani, will chair the Creative Documentary jury and American producer and activist, Pat Mitchell, will chair the Human Rights Jury. So you can see, women, as always, are present at the FIDFH, but there will be men too! On March 11, we have a thematic evening, Masculinities, on the position of men in society, with the projection of a French film, La Virilité, directed by a woman, Cécile Denjean.

What other events of particular interest to UN Special readers are planned?

Other events with a particularly Swiss flavour include a special evening to celebrate the 30th birthday of the World Wide Web on March 12 and a debate with its inventor Tim Berners-Lee in partnership with CERN. On March 17, Former President of the Swiss Confederation, Ruth Dreifuss, now a member of the Global Commission on Drug Policy, will speak on the progressively harsher repression of criminal and terrorist organizations in Switzerland and the relation between crime and punishment. The debate will be sparked by an American film, The Sentence, about a woman who received a 15-year jail term for conspiracy years after her relationship with a drug baron ended.

On a lighter note, Isabelle, and to mark your entering a new decade, I would like to ask you five questions taken from the Proust questionnaire. How would you describe your current state of mind?
Focused, excited and curious.
Curious… about what’s going to happen, what will be debated and how it will be received. We have prepared as much as it is possible to prepare, but now the Festival will be what it will be and live its life. We never know how an edition will turn out. It’s always very different.

I will ask you the next two questions together. What is the quality you most like in a man? And what is the quality you most like in a woman? (thoughtful) Do we have to make a difference between men and women? I try not to.
Well, maybe there are some characteristics that are more intrinsically masculine or feminine?
No, absolutely not. Absolutely not. The quality of a human being I like the most… is kindness. The world needs social justice; the world needs empathy; the world needs a little bit more love. Lack of kindness is the root of all the problems we have now. Be kind to one another; take care of one another; we can’t love everyone, but we can be kind to them.

Which historical figure do you most identify with?
Isabelle Eberhardt is one of my models… the voyager, adventurer and pioneer… and she’s Swiss and we share the same first name!

Do you have a motto?
On ne lâche rien – never give up.

Thank you Isabelle and bon Festival!
Crowdsourcing ideas to boost gender equality in global health research and leadership

MARIAM OTMANI DEL BARRIO AND PASCAL LAUNOIS, SPECIAL PROGRAMME TDR, WHO

Grace Gabagaya is a medical doctor in Uganda currently researching innovative strategies to support prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV. When it came time to decide whether or not to pursue a master’s degree, she received some cautionary advice.

“I was told by some people that highly educated women never find suitors for marriage,” she says. “Many women thus choose to pursue family goals over career goals simply for the purpose of not ending up as social outcasts.”

Gabagaya’s personal experience is one reflection of how patriarchy in many societies imposes gender stereotypes and reinforces inequalities. This experience prompted her to share ideas that would help overcome some of these barriers for women to seize career-advancing opportunities. At the second annual Women Leaders Global Health Conference, hosted by the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine in November, Gabagaya and five other women scientists presented their winning proposals as part of a crowdsourcing challenge contest organized by the Special Programme for Research and Training in Tropical Diseases (TDR), co-sponsored by UNICEF, UNDP, the World Bank and WHO.

The crowdsourcing contest solicited creative ideas to address the fact that women are less likely to apply for TDR’s Clinical Research and Development Fellowship for scientists in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). In response, 311 proposals were submitted from across the globe. The contest is part of TDR’s broader effort to improve gender equity and equality in health research and leadership. TDR has a longstanding history in strengthening research capacity among women scientists and supporting research to answer gender-specific questions as they relate to infectious diseases of poverty.

This exploration of barriers to women leadership in science comes at a time when there is growing global momentum for real change to address gender inequality and empower all women and girls, as articulated by Goal 5 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Gender inequality in the scientific world is no exception. Globally, less than 30% of the world’s researchers are women. Until recently, very little global attention had focused on recognizing and addressing worldwide disparities and inequalities that women face in science, be it early in their careers or further down the line when trying to pursue leadership positions.

Socioeconomic disparities and inequalities also happen among and between women. The less tangible aspects of inequalities, including the class divide, the lack of decision power, diminished opportunities and discrimination are equally important when trying to understand and address the political dimensions of public health research and the barriers to support careers of women in science. Responses require addressing deeper inequalities rooted in gender and other social factors that shape discrimination well before any scientific career takes off: whether one is born in a high- or low-income country, whether one belongs to a certain socioeconomic class, whether one is younger than peers or other factors such as race or sexual orientation.

Career challenges may be even more amplified for women in LMICs, particularly those facing poverty or difficulties in access to education. Saha Naseri, a Kabul Medical School graduate who was awarded a TDR-supported postgraduate scholarship, was home-schooled in secret until age eight as education for girls in her hometown was forbidden under the Taliban.

Despite the challenges, there are also opportunities to address them. Building and sustaining research capacity has been a core activity of TDR since its inception, including support for individual researchers through training courses, and programmes that develop leadership skills in low- and middle-income countries, particularly with an aim to address gender inequality in science.
The Clinical Research and Development Fellowship is one such example. Qualified scientists from LMICs are awarded 12-month placements in a pharmaceutical company, product development partnership or research institution. In addition to gaining practical skills for conducting clinical trials in LMICs, fellows are given networking opportunities and exposed to coordination and monitoring of research studies.

Despite these opportunities, the percentage of women awarded fellowships is only 22% for the three calls for applications during the last four years. TDR has identified that this imbalance does not take place during the selection process, but rather earlier in the application stage when too few women apply.

Helen Anyasi, a medical doctor in Nigeria and mother of two, highlights that when considering whether or not to pursue a master’s degree three years ago, she found it difficult to make her choice: “The decision to undertake any career opportunity is always measured by how it will affect my family,” Anyasi said. “This poses a huge barrier among women who want to undertake these kinds of opportunities. Family responsibilities are still mainly considered the woman’s domain, even in progressive societies.”

Gabagaya suggested supporting women by developing a mentoring programme as well as sharing profiles of women scientists that show how they balance careers with personal life. Other proposals included installing a nomination process that would encourage qualified women to apply, as well as providing support for child care and education during the fellowship period.

The reality worldwide is therefore complex and challenging: Many women – let alone people that do not necessarily fit into binary identities – still work in societies and institutions that discriminate and pose barriers to career development. There is still a long way to see men and women sharing equal responsibilities in terms of caregiving, to see opportunities and human rights reach everyone equally. Thus, the gender-responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development requires active engagement and collaboration to combat inequalities, protect and promote human rights, and ensure that both men and women share equally the benefits of sustainable development.

To learn more about women in science

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INTERVIEW

We need to integrate gender perspectives in arms control and disarmament processes

Dr. Renata Dwan, the Director of United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, (UNIDIR) is an International Gender Champion with broad experience working on peace and security issues at the United Nations. We met her to learn more about her Institute and her views on gender equality.

Alex Mejia, UN Special Editor-in-Chief: Dr. Dwan, thank you for giving us your time. You were appointed director of UNIDIR on 19 January 2018 a year ago. Please tell us more about yourself and your mission as the head of this organization. What were the main challenges at your arrival?

Dr. Renata Dwan: Thank you for this opportunity. I’ve been with the United Nations since 2005, but this is my first time serving in Geneva and it has been a great change. I was living in New York previously, and have worked with UN peace operations in Afghanistan, Congo, Haiti, and Syria. With each new location, it has been interesting to see the similarities and differences. Most of my time in the UN has been spent on peace and security issues, including special political missions, looking at field support issues, and working on peace and security reforms.

Before the UN, I worked in research on issues related to conflict and peace mediation efforts with the “Stockholm International Peace Research Institute” and the “EastWest Institute in Central and Eastern Europe”. Taking this position with UNIDIR was a fantastic opportunity to learn more about another part of the UN and to see the possibilities for synergy as part of the UN system.

I see disarmament as part of the broader UN engagement of peace and security – it is part of the mandate and the Charter of the United Nations with regard to the maintenance of international peace and security. These worlds are quite interactive and connected.

The Secretary-General has called for a holistic approach and for a more connected UN, and this is a great opportunity. When you move to a different side of the UN, you can take a fresh look at both old and new issues, and say, “where are there points of connection and convergence?” The United Nations was established after WWII to support the maintenance of a peaceful international order, with people at the center. As we are in a turbulent period of change in international order, and as we move from a bipolar world to a multipolar world, we must explore how arms control, nonproliferation and disarmament can help us manage that transition, in a way that avoids conflict and prevents crisis. I think that’s the mandate for all of us working in multilateral organizations.

There are three main challenges I have encountered. The first is how to be an autonomous institution within the UN framework. How do we balance independent research with carrying out our mandate to support Member States and other UN colleagues in their negotiations? We also must balance the breadth of the arms control agenda, covering everything from conventional arms to nuclear, strategic, biological and chemical weapons, to new tech issues – from space to artificial intelligence. It is a
huge agenda, and as a small institution, we must prioritize aspects to be relevant across these areas.

The second challenge is discovering how to constantly innovate, be fresh, new and responsive, while also maintaining continuity. This is a challenge for any research institution, particularly one inside the United Nations where things move relatively slowly. We need to be very clear on signaling where we move.

And finally, the institutional financial operating of UNIDIR is a challenge – we are almost entirely voluntarily funded. At a time when arms control has suffered from perceptional stagnation in terms of progress and agreements, this becomes particularly difficult. There are challenges to overcome both perception issues as well as actual fundraising challenges.

The mandate of UNIDIR is to support Member States in their disarmament and arms control negotiations. Through this, we facilitate the informed participation of all Member States because not all Member States have the resources or the capacities to be fully briefed and able to invest. This is an important part of our work – we give all Members States the chance to engage.

You implemented a major reform on the Institute. Would you like to share some details on that process and where it stands since your arrival?

In keeping with these challenges that I described, we’ve put quite a bit of effort into defining a strategic research agenda that is both transparent and balanced, while addressing the contemporary and real needs of Member States. We have been moving away from an individual, project-based approach, toward a programmatic approach. We have set in place a research agenda, approved by our Board of Trustees. It intentionally makes clear to Member States what we are seeking funding for, what we are working on, and avoids any perceptions of our research catering to individual Member States requests or to specific issues. We are also now fundraising according to these multi-year programmatic agendas. It is a model many think-tanks and UN agencies have adopted.

Another issue is visibility. UNIDIR hasn’t had a communications capacity in the past. We are very keen to engage with a broader audience, not just in Geneva but outside too. We have been exploring how our message and our products can be communicated to a wider community. This includes introducing a fellowship programme to encourage more diversity in perspectives and partnerships.

UNIDIR is launching innovative projects to tackle violence and criminality in urban contexts. Can you tell us more about the questions you’re exploring in this realm?

Conflict and violence have become very blurred. Defining what is an armed conflict, and what is organized crime, is a new challenge. Non-state actors are becoming frequently interspersed, and this impacts the way violence and conflict are being fought, primarily in urban settings. When we consider how, where, and what weapons are used, we need to be mindful of those contexts.

As we look at these weapons, we need to ask ourselves – are the weapons the drivers of conflict, or are weapons just the symptoms? We need to look at patterns of illicit trafficking.
around small arms, of weapons but also of ammunition. As we move toward the world’s largest cities – not just in Latin America but also in Asia and Africa – how do we organize states to deal with these problems? How do we understand the way that our regulations and controls and management, not just at the international level but at the domestic level, work?

Another dimension that we are exploring are the tactics, techniques, procedures, and policies that security forces use to mitigate civilian harm as required under international humanitarian law. This is an area of work that we are very keen to look at, and this work is key to supporting the Secretary General’s Agenda for Disarmament with a more holistic approach.

Gender is one of the four research priorities of UNIDIR for the 2018–2020 period. Why do gender perspective need to be integrated in disarmament and peace-making processes? Traditionally, arms control, nonproliferation and disarmament have been a male dominated activity. This is especially evident if we look at the first committee and compare it to other committees in the General Assembly. As a gender parity goal, we want more women in the room. We believe that bringing more diversity to the discussion and debates in arms control will strengthen the outcomes. If we look at the experience of women working on peace and security for the past twenty years, and what they brought to the table on peace-making processes – inclusion, socioeconomic issues, health issues – we can broaden the way we discuss and think about peace and conflict. If we bring that perspective to arms control, we can acquire new benefits, new insights, new perspectives. The truth is that women and men are affected differently by different weapons and different patterns of warfare. If we are thinking about regulating weapons, we need to consider gender perspective. So, we can target our efforts to address them.

You are a member of the International Gender Champions. As a gender champion, what are the most important actions the UN should undertake to empower women and actively address gender equality?

I think the UN first needs to “sort out its own shop,” which is what the Secretary-General is trying to do. It’s very well to tell everybody about the role of women, but you need to walk the walk yourself. Second, we need to show the diversity of perspectives that women have brought to the table on different agendas. Third, we need to normalize women being at the tables – demystifying the role and presence of women’s engagement. And lastly – and I think this is the key area – while across many societies, more junior women are increasingly present, we still are not seeing women in senior decision making positions. So, we must explore how the UN can lead by example and demonstrate that women can and should be in senior decision-making processes. At the same time, I think the UN needs to be sensitive to the fact that societies are different and move at their own paces. We need to avoid a “one-size fits all” approach, even if we have a shared goal. Bringing women to the table brings diversity and with that, there is better decision making.

Thank you. To conclude, what would you say to young women in the UN in peace operations, and conflict emergencies, as advice to them, to advance their careers, to reach those places that you mention?

I would say four things. First, go out into the field. Don’t only stay in UN Headquarters, in Geneva or Nairobi, or Vienna or New York. To really understand the world, you need to go out and be part of the world the UN seeks to speak for. Try to take those field opportunities when they are there. You will benefit enormously from trying to get different perspectives and see the UN in a more operational context, and often, that provides inspiration. Second, it is important to have a network of women that can be supportive. In the corporate world, there are “boys’ networks,” but I do think there is real value in having a supportive network of women who can share and exchange. Third, I would emphasize the importance of having a mentor, someone who can be a role model. A lot of women are prepared to serve as a mentor if you reach out to them, and say, “I would really like once every few months to have a cup of coffee together.” Finally, don’t give up. A lot of young women join the UN and there is parity until about the P4 level, and then it drops off. I think that’s the moment in time to find your network, find your mentor, and say, “I can be here.”

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GENDER BREAKDOWN BY ENTITY

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GENDER AT THE UNIT

“By the end of my mandate, we should reach full gender parity at the Under-Secretary-General and Assistant Secretary-General levels, including special representatives and special envoys. We need a clear road map with benchmarks and time frames to achieve parity across the system well before the target year of 2030.”

ANTÓNIO GUTERRES
SECRETARY-GENERAL
OF THE UNITED NATIONS

EVOLUTION OF GENDER AT HIGHER LEVELS
REPRESENTATION IN THE UN SYSTEM 2003-2015:

+ 7.3%
Only in 12 years in % of UN Staff

At this rate, gender parity will be achieved in 2026

COMPOSITION OF GENDER AT ALL LEVELS
PERCENTAGES IN THE UN SYSTEM IN 2015:

WOMEN 43.6% 56.4% MEN

GENDER AT HIGHER LEVEL IN GENEVA**

70.6%

29.4%
PARITY IN PEACEKEEPING MISSIONS
A long way to go...

GENDER BREAKDOWN IN PEACEKEEPING MISSIONS
- 22% Civilian personnel
- 10% Police personnel
- 3% Military personnel

GENDER BREAKDOWN BY STAFF CATEGORY

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GENDER BREAKDOWN FIELD AND NON-FIELD ENTITIES

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*UN Secretariat Entities
** Under-Secretary-General, Assistant Secretary-General, Deputy Director-General, Assistant Director-General, Director-General, and Secretary-General
Source: UN Secretariat Gender Parity Dashboard
How long has Qatar been a member of the United Nations?

Qatar joined the United Nations in 1971 and opened a Permanent Mission in New York the same year, and in 1974 it opened the Permanent mission in Geneva. Since then, Qatar has been actively involved in United Nations collective efforts at the regional and global levels. We value our strategic partnership and work to achieve its objectives. This includes the maintenance of international peace and security, the promotion and protection of human rights, the provision of humanitarian relief and participation in collective efforts and initiatives to address current and emerging challenges. We also cooperate with the Security Council and other relevant United Nations bodies to combat terrorism and violent extremism.

Qatar played a crucial role in resolving difficult international issues that contributed to the maintenance of international peace and security. For instance, Qatari mediation played a vital role in reaching the Doha Peace Agreement in Darfur, in the reconciliation between Djibouti and Mali, and in ending the presidential vacuum in Lebanon. We also continue to seek reconciliation among the Palestinians and to ensure the success of the Afghan peace talks held in February this year in Doha.

How does Qatar engage with the agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals?

In commitment to its National Vision 2030 and the Sustainable Development Agenda 2030, the State of Qatar has aligned the outcomes and goals of the Second National Development Strategy (NDS-2) 2018–2022 with the goals of the Sustainable Development Agenda. Through the efforts of its national institutions, Qatar has achieved many important objectives in areas that include infrastructure and transportation development, enhancing security and safety procedures, urban development and its implications on health, education, work, and culture, as well as completing many projects in energy, water and electricity sectors, environment preservation and strengthening partnerships with different sectors.

One of Qatar’s priorities in international cooperation is to assist other States in achieving the Agenda 2030. Likewise, the National Vision 2030 affirms Qatar’s willingness to participate in international cooperation. The most important goals of this vision are namely, to enhance Qatar’s regional...
The transformation that is taking place in the State of Qatar cannot be discussed without highlighting the crucial role of Qatari women, can you tell us more about this issue?

The political leadership in Qatar plays an important role in supporting women to achieve equal rights and enhance women’s position in society. Qatar’s Permanent Constitution of 2004 affirms women’s crucial role in society and enshrines their rights, by stressing on the principle of equality between all citizens.

One of the strongest advocates of women’s empowerment in Qatar is HH Sheikha Moza bint Nasser, the mother of the current Emir, and Chairperson of Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development (QF), a private non-profit organization founded in 1995. Through this position, she has been working to highlight the prominent role of Qatari women and to encourage them to move forward with social responsibilities and participation in public life. The local, regional, and international projects launched by HH Sheikha Moza bint Nasser, particularly in the education and social development fields, made her a role model for Qatari women and women around the world.

Nowadays Qatari women play a significant role in the country’s development without having to forego their Arab and Islamic identity and principles. Alongside their countrymen, Qatari women are leading the country’s economic, political, social, and sports transformations to realize Qatar National Vision 2030.

Qatar is the 2nd biggest OCHA donor (2019) and is among UNHCR’s “$20 million club”, composed by the most prominent donor countries with contributions of more than 20 million US dollars.

What are the priorities of your Mission to strengthen its cooperation with the United Nations and its specialized agencies based in Geneva?

Since June 2017, Qatar has been subjected to a blockade and to unilateral coercive measures by some countries. These measures violate the UN Charter, the international law, and the peaceful relations between States. Due to continuing human rights violations that have accompanied these measures, the Permanent Mission seeks to draw the attention of the Human Rights Council and the High Commissioner for UN Special – March 2019 | 27

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For all levels

2 WEEK COURSES
4 - 15 February 2019 1 - 12 July 2019
3 WEEK COURSES
15 July - 2 August 2019 15 July - 23 August 2019
UNIVERSITY PREPARATORY COURSE
15 July - 23 August 2019

FOR PROGRAMMES AND INFORMATION
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and global roles economically, politically and culturally, especially within the United Nations system, to support the dialogue of civilizations and promote coexistence between religions and cultures, in addition to the maintenance of international peace and security through humanitarian and development assistance.

Several governmental and non-governmental Qatari organizations support humanitarian efforts around the world, notably the Qatar Development Fund, Qatar Charity and the Education Above All Foundation, which last year brought globally 10 million displaced children to school. On its part, Silatech Foundation, a Qatar-based international development organization seeking decent work for young people, succeeded in providing one million jobs to young people in more than 16 countries.
and urges them to act through their mechanisms such as the special procedures, the universal periodic review and other relevant mechanisms and to stop these violations and compensate those affected and hold accountable those responsible. This issue will remain a priority for our Permanent Mission until the determination of these measures. In this regard, I would like to point out that the State of Qatar has filed complaints against the blocking States with several international organizations such as the World Trade Organization and the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, as well as the International Court of Justice.

In addition, human rights issues occupy a sizeable part of our Permanent Mission’s attention. Qatar was one of the first countries to join the Human Rights Council since its establishment in 2006 and its current term will continue until December 2020. Our Permanent Mission highlights the efforts of Qatar and reflects the progress made in the promotion and protection of human rights at the national level. In this regard, I would like to mention the recent accession of the State of Qatar to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, as well as the significant progress made in promoting the rights of expatriate workers at the legislative and executive levels, namely the abolition of the sponsorship system. In April 2018, ILO opened an office in Doha as part of a three-year programme of cooperation.

Moreover, our Permanent Mission participates in the international efforts to promote and protect human rights. Particularly regarding the Palestinian question, the Syrian crisis, and all issues related to the Arab and Islamic world.

What about your perspectives and expectations for this new year ahead?
First, we would like to express our great appreciation for the mediation efforts led by H.H. the Emir of Kuwait to resolve the Gulf crisis. We reiterate that Qatar has repeatedly expressed its willingness to engage in dialogue in order to find a comprehensive solution based on mutual respect and the upholding of each country’s sovereignty and political independence. We hope that the countries behind the blockade shall heed to the sound of mind and participate in the dialogue without any preconditions.

Also, 2019 is expected to see a qualitative leap in the strategic partnership between Qatar and the United Nations; we signed historic agreements on the margins of the Doha Forum 2018, whereby Qatar contributed $ 500 million to support the work of the United Nations bodies, including UNDP, UNHCR, UNICEF, the Counter-Terrorism Committee of the Security Council (CTC), and UNRWA.

On the other hand, Doha is preparing to be a headquarters of major UN agencies and bodies. This step reflects the confidence of the United Nations and international organizations in the State of Qatar and reaffirms the position of the Qatari diplomacy in the international arena. The most prominent of these organizations are OCHA, IOM, UNHCR, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Counter-Terrorism Committee of the Security Council.

To conclude, do you have a message for young people working...
INTERVIEW

The World Bank Group

A development institution first!

*The World Bank Group is a vital source of financial and technical assistance to developing countries around the world. It is not a bank in the ordinary sense but a unique partnership to reduce poverty and support development. We met Mr. Jos Verbeek, Manager and Special Representative to the UN and WTO in Geneva to tell us more about the organization.*

**UN Special Editor-in-Chief, Mr. Alex Mejia:** Can you tell us about the priorities of the World Bank Group (WBG) Geneva Office and your key areas of engagement?

**Mr. Jos Verbeek:** The world has changed dramatically over the past five decades, and so has the WBG. Given our institution is constantly evolving, so are the priorities of this office. First and foremost, the Geneva office serves a multilateral purpose by maintaining relations with International Geneva. It provides the interface between the WBG and the Geneva/European based UN agencies and key international organizations. Then, given the evolving nature of our corporate strategies, it is important for our office to convey these priorities and to find synergies with key partners. For the past few years, our main focus has been on: First and foremost, highlighting the WBG’s engagement in the 2030 agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). To deliver on this agenda, the Geneva office we have been promoting the “Maximizing Finance for Development” approach in events and discussions with UN agencies, permanent missions, private sector and other partners. Related activities include engaging in Geneva Finance for SDGs initiative (collaboration between UN agencies and finance institutions). Moreover, to assist countries with the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, we support the areas of data and of course implementation modalities and strategic relations on science, technology and innovation with relevant Geneva-based actors and processes.
The WBG is also more engaged than ever in the Humanitarian – Development – Peace continuum. The WBG’s engagement in fragile and conflict situations is now a top and increasingly urgent strategic priority for our institution and donors. To support this new focus, the Geneva office has been strategically positioning the WBG by expanding its engagement in selected humanitarian processes that overlap with development, such as in the areas of resilience, including addressing pandemic emergencies and famine.

In addition, various of our corporate priorities, including Health, Trade and Disaster Risk Management require that the office in Geneva interacts with agencies such as WTO, WHO, GAVI, the Global Fund, UNHCR and IOM to address them.

The centrality of Geneva as a hub of multilateral trade and investment greatly facilitates our ability to keep abreast of the evolving policy challenges and analytical needs in matters of trade and investment governance. The Geneva Office has also strengthened our institutional relationship with both the World Meteorological Organization and the Global Framework for Climate Services.

Furthermore, our office is always looking for additional opportunities for collaboration and stronger engagements in other areas such as: Labour, Human Rights, and Environment/Climate Change issues. Finally, the office of course supports senior management engagement with Geneva based actors on key corporate priorities; such as famine, forced displacement and health. For example, we collaborate with UNHCR on the Global Compact for Refugees and Host Communities.

How does the World Bank Group support the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the 2030 Agenda?

The WBG basically works in every major area of development. The WBG provides a wide array of financial products and technical assistance, and we help countries share and apply innovative knowledge and solutions to the challenges they face.

As a background, let me share that the SDGs are well aligned with the World Bank Group’s twin goals to end extreme poverty by 2030, and to boost shared prosperity among the poorest 40 percent around the world in a sustainable manner.

Three priorities guide our work with countries:

**First**, the world needed a new vision for financing development to accelerate inclusive, sustainable economic growth. In a world where achieving the SDGs will cost trillions every year, and where official development assistance is stagnant in the billions, we cannot end poverty without a fundamental different approach. With the adoption of the Hamburg Principles in July 2017, the G-20 endorsed an approach that we call the Cascade, which will assist countries to attract more private financial resources and is part of WBG objective of Maximizing Finance for Development

**Second**, we need innovative financial tools to help poor countries do what wealthy ones have long done, to build resilience to shocks and threats and use financial innovations to share the risks of crisis with global capital markets. This spring we saw the first rapid disbursement of the Pandemic Emergency Facility with a grant to support the Ebola response in the Democratic Republic of Congo. With this facility, we are, together with our partners, improving response times and finding new ways to help the poorest countries and people in need of assistance.

**Third**, we must find new ways to help countries invest more and more effectively in their people. The changing nature of work will require specific, complex skills, and human capital will become an increasingly valuable resource. With our Human Capital Project, launched last year at our Annual Meetings in Bali, we are developing a rigorous and detailed measure of human capital in each country.

You participated in the World Investment Forum to speak about “People-First Public-private partnerships (PPPs)”. Can you tell us more about this innovative financing mechanism to close the SDG investment financing gap?

The WBG is quite favorable to PPPs but what we must remember is that PPPs also carry risks. The WBG, in partnership with the IMF, UNCTAD and UNECE, is drafting key principles of PPPs. These principles will help answer questions such as: who carries the financial risk in the case that a PPP goes wrong? Is it the private sector or the public sector? If it is the public sector, it will most likely affect the budget and public resources without providing the expected outcomes. I am still a macro-growth economist and one of the lessons learned is that it is better to be prudent up front than sorry. Therefore, it is important to build capabilities at country level to handle PPPs, including in the area of debt management in combination with a good public investment management system. In parallel, it is also necessary
to have a good understanding of what are the social benefits and the priorities from an economic perspective.

I think the bank is doing an excellent job in pushing for that so there is more awareness on all the implications. Thank for that. Now, can you tell us about the WBG’s engagement with Internal Displaced Persons, refugees and migration in general as you mentioned it earlier?

These are important topics that are more and more emerging as crucial development challenges. The reason is that extreme poverty is now increasingly concentrated among vulnerable groups, including the one who had to flee in the face of conflict and violence for instance. As a development institution, the World Bank Group is concerned with reducing extreme poverty and improving the situation of the most vulnerable groups. With regards to the refugee issue, we are concerned with reducing poverty among both the forcibly displaced and their host communities, as part of a broader effort to achieve the SDGs. Our focus is on tackling the medium to long term. We play a complementary role, complementary to, but distinct, from the rights-based protection agenda and the focus on short term crises responses.

In addition, we are taking a new look at prevention and preparedness, because it saves lives and resources. In the past, humanitarian and development interventions, happened in a sequential manner: humanitarians first and development actors second, grosso modo. This would often mean that many development outcomes had deteriorated and that many projects would have to basically be restarted from scratch. If it is a half year crisis, as e.g., climate related or natural disaster, the WBG might be able to come right back or even better, stay. It is of course more complicated in conflict affected countries.

My point is, the WBG is more and more present upstream to ensure development gains are not completely lost. Insuring good health, education and job opportunities to displaced people and host communities is also connected to prevention. As pointed, the cost of prevention is much lower than the cost of the dealing with full blown humanitarian crises. The WBG together with the UN recently wrote a report on prevention, Pathways to peace1 and our office in Geneva played an important role in facilitating the preparation and circulate of this report.

To conclude, do you have a message for younger professionals, people who have thirty years or less? You have been very successful so what would be your advice to young professionals within the international structure.

I joined the World Bank 25 years ago and I came straight out of academia as a mathematical and growth economist. I think today the WBG would never hire me. I interviewed quite a few young people who wanted to work in the WBG, and I was impressed by many of them. Many young people today use their free time to go abroad to experience the lifestyle and the social environment in low- and middle-income countries, and this is very important, to better understand how we can help these countries. I remember that in the past managers would live with poor and often rural communities for 1 or 2 weeks. This was a great initiative as it was certainly an advantage to realize how these communities were making a living to feed their families. In our generation, we were expected to do better than our parents who lived through World War II and economic hardship and therefore the development model extensively focussed on economic growth. Now we need a new development model, one that puts more emphasis on sustainability (especially environmental and social). I hope that we can count on the young generation to make that happen.

2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Promoting People – first PPPs

Generating massive investments into high quality infrastructure, especially in low income countries, will be critical for success in meeting the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) have been identified as a vehicle by which such investments can be generated. However, not all PPPs are appropriate for this purpose – a point often made by representatives of the NGO community.

Accordingly, the goal should be to develop specific types of PPPs – People-first PPPs – that put sustainable development as the target and ‘people’ at their core. There are many examples of these projects such as inter alia the following:

• Urban metro schemes that are affordable and accessible to all, allowing people to go to work, access public services and leisure options.
• Waste to energy disposal schemes for refugee camps so that rats do not breed in the putrefying or bite the children.
• “Last building standing” facilities that come into operation in the aftermath of disasters to provide command and critical care services in desperate situations where there is no power and no buildings to conduct the rescue effort.
• Haemo-dialysis projects that provide clinical care to patients suffering from renal failure and which the public sector because of both the lack of resources and technological capability, cannot otherwise provide, thereby prolonging and saving lives.
• International cross border road and rail projects that put local communities in isolated areas into contact with important regional and national markets, allowing for example, farmers in such areas to sell their products.

These examples are immensely varied, but they share common features. Firstly, they all show what can be done by governments and the private sector working together, bringing what they are best equipped to contribute: the public sector with its powers of regulation and protecting the public interest while the private sector with its organizational capabilities, innovation, finance and management expertise etc. Secondly, they involve cross-sectoral and integrated approaches so that the impact on sustainable development is much greater than if the projects are conceived only within the parameters of their own specific sector. Finally, and most importantly, they address the UN 2030 Agenda of “People, Planet and Prosperity”.

What are People-first PPPs?
People-first PPPs (PiPPPs) are long term legal contracts between the public and private sector where the private sector typically designs, provides management and financing to infrastructure assets. People-first projects can be defined in terms of the following five outcomes that are needed to achieve the 2030 Development Agenda:

• Increasing equity and access to critical services, e.g. water and sanitation, especially to socially and economically vulnerable groups.
• Economically effective, offering value for money, and not resulting in unsustainable levels of public debt, while offering employment opportunities to local communities, especially women and young people.
• Environmentally sustainable and resilient.
• Replicable, including the transfer of skills that can allow more projects to be achieved.
• Engaging responsibly and comprehensively with all stakeholders so that the latter are fully involved in the design and operation of the project.

The private sector arguably is ready to prove their commitment to the UN Sustainable Development Goals and to drive their projects to meet such exacting standards. Besides, the more valuable a project in a sustainable sense, the more likely it is to be replicated and thus more likely the private entity can benefit from access to more projects. Although it might be argued that critical services, such as health or education, should be delivered by the state, the reality is that this will not happen: states especially those in low and middle-income countries do not have the resources to meet their critical needs while even in the wealthiest countries, citizens are not always prepared to pay a higher level of taxation. Hence people-first PPP in whatever form are here to stay.

Promoting People-first PPPs
The 2030 Development Agenda is a time determinate programme and urgent actions are needed especially in generating major infrastructure using the People-first approaches. In this regard the UNECE is working with its partners inside the United Nations and outside with the international financial institutions, namely the World Bank, the EBRD and others. The UNECE is with these groups, adopting three interlinked strategies to mainstream PiPPPs:
1. Incentivizing the private sector so that it delivers the high-quality infrastructure projects the SDGs need. Companies need to know that their projects have indeed qualified as People-first and also that their track record and People-first commitments translate into governments selecting them in competitive tenders. Thus, the UNECE is working with organizations to develop an evaluation methodology that will ‘score’ projects against the People-first criteria and evaluate their impact on the achievement of the SDGs.

2. Standardize and Institutionalize the requirements for PPP. One of the products of UNECE’s work in this area are the 10 Guiding Principles for promoting PPPs that have been developed in response to the Addis Ababa Action Agenda (para 48), listed in the box below.

3. Cooperating with China by encouraging PPP in the Belt & Road Initiative. In fact, the UNECE jointly with the National Development and Reform Commission of China launched a call to countries to develop 10 flagship projects that can become standard bearers of the values that are incorporated into both the Chinese initiative and the 2030 Development Agenda.

In its endeavor to contribute significantly to achieving the SDGs, the UNECE has established several International PPP Specialist Centres of Excellence working in specific areas to promote PPPs that are aligned with the People-first PPP Guiding Principles.

**Conclusion**

PPP should be the approach used when organizing projects for infrastructure development and complying with the 2030 Development Agenda. This approach can make the SDGs more realizable and constitute a more acceptable model of PPP that might assuage the critics especially in developed countries. It is important however that such an approach be mainstreamed within the whole UN system and our Programme thus strongly welcomes new partners to join this collective effort in the spirit of “One UN”.

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1. Chief, Cooperation and Partnerships Section, United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
2. Director General, Research Centre, China International Engineering Consulting Corporation, and vice Chairman of the Bureau of the UNECE Working Party on PPP
3. Many civil society organizations think that governments’ use of PPPs introduces a dangerous profit motive in the delivery of public services, and that PPP is basically about ‘privatizing the rewards and socializing the costs’.
4. This concept emerged in the immediate aftermath of the Hurricane Yolanda that struck the Philippines in 2013. When Dr. Enrique Ona, the Secretary of Health, arrived at one of the most devastated areas, there was no power or any other service standing. He thus could do nothing and had to leave. A command centre with power and supplies would have instead saved lives in the critical two or three days after the disaster.
5. Two other lines of cooperation with NDRC include the enhancement of member States’ institutional capacity in PPP development and the International Policy Dialogue on PPP in Belt and Road countries.
6. The International PPP Specialist Centres of Excellence affiliated to UNECE focus on the following areas: Policies, Laws and Institutions (France), Smart cities (Spain), Local Government (Japan), Public Transport Logistics (China), Belt and Road (China), Recovery and Resilience (USA), Water and Sanitation (Portugal), and Ports (Lebanon).

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**The Guiding Principles for People-first Public-Private Partnerships for Sustainable Development Goals**

1. **Principle 1** – Build into infrastructure strategies the People-first transformative agenda, making sure that peoples’ needs are listened to

2. **Principle 2** – Deliver more, better, simpler People-first projects by joining up government and allowing cities and other local levels to develop projects themselves

3. **Principle 3** – Increase officials’ skills in delivering People-first projects, particularly ensuring that governments know how better empower women in projects as well as encouraging the private sector too to help build the skills to shape the high-quality projects needed

4. **Principle 4** – Make more inclusive legal and regulatory frameworks that allow for active engagement of communities and focus as well on a zero-tolerance approach to corruption

5. **Principle 5** – Disclose more information about projects to society especially on the commitments made to the various partners in the project

6. **Principle 6** – De-risk projects by providing more predictability in the enabling environment

7. **Principle 7** – Set out clearly the projects’ selection criteria to promote “Value for People”, not only “Value for Money” so that the best People-first projects can be selected

8. **Principle 8** – Make environmental sustainability a key component of evaluating, awarding and implementing PPP projects

9. **Principle 9** – Ensure that blended financing catalyzes private partners to invest in People-first projects

10. **Principle 10** – Avoid debt traps by ensuring the fiscal sustainability of projects and the transparency of fiscal policies
Global Tour – UN Special feature

A hundred years in a day – the ILO embraces the globe with a ‘virtual’ tour

At 100 years young the International Labour Organization (ILO) is not just the UN’s oldest specialised entity, it has grown to stand among those with the greatest reach.

SOPHY FISHER, ILO
Acknowledging this particular strength, the ILO is marking its centenary with a day-long ‘virtual’ Global Tour, live-streaming special centenary events from 24 ILO offices around the world in a continuous, 24 hour webcast.

The webcast relay will traverse all five permanently-inhabited continents – Oceania, Asia, Africa, Europe and the Americas. The intention is that each office will contribute an hour of live webcasting, with a local flavour, so creating a global picture of the diversity and range of the ILO’s work.

The result will be an exhilarating multi-national, multi-lingual and multi-cultural journey through world of work themes – past, present and future – enlivened with music, dancing, balloons and birthday cakes.

“The webcast will showcase the unique breadth and scope of the ILO’s work,” said Martin Murphy, Director of the ILO Department of Communications, which is organizing the Tour. “It is the perfect way to celebrate the impact the ILO has had and give a glimpse of our plans for the future.”

The Tour kicks off where the world’s day officially starts, on the International Date Line in Fiji, where the ILO’s Suva office is responsible for activities in 11 Pacific Island member States.

As with all the Tour destinations, the Suva event will have the ILO’s constituents at its core – representatives of governments, workers and employers joining together on an equal footing, as they...
do with all the ILO’s activities and decisions. In Suva, they’ll be joined by the President of Fiji and Melanesian and Polynesian entertainers.

Next stop is Manila where key local decent work issues will be showcased. These include the rights of indigenous peoples (appropriate, since the country is home to 110 different groups and the ILO is responsible for the only international instrument that deals exclusively with their rights), labour migration, child labour, the informal economy, freedom of association, occupational safety and health, and the future of work.

The Global Tour producers have been encouraged to showcase local strengths. The Philippines – with a reputation for world-class entertainment talent – is kicking off with a shadow play by El Gamma Penumbra, grand champions from the Asia’s Got Talent TV show, who will perform a specially-created show using the ILO’s Centenary song, “We’ve Got a Vision”.

Next, the Tour goes to Beijing and Bangkok, where it arrives just as festivities for the Thai New Year begin. As part of this focus on the future the event will also host the signing of Thailand’s first Decent Work Country programme.

“The logistics of coordinating video production and live streaming in 24 countries has been challenging,” said Justin Smith, Senior Social Media Officer; ILO. “We decided to automate as much of the production work as possible by building a web application that would juggle the live-stream video feeds automatically, without anyone having to flip switches.”

From Bangkok, the live-stream jumps from Dhaka to Colombo, New Delhi, Addis Ababa, Antananarivo, Moscow, Amman, Beirut and Cairo, where the 4,000 year old Pyramids will be the backdrop for a high-level celebration of music and speeches.

Next events shift to Europe, at the ILO’s Training Centre in Turin and HQ in Geneva. Here the focus is firmly on the ILO’s second century. A panel discussion, organized in partnership with the Financial Times, will bring together the ILO’s Director-General, Guy Ryder, and key figures from the public and private sectors, to discuss ways to build a sustainable, socially just, future of work.

Discussions will focus on three key themes: The current situation, which seems to provide opportunities for the few and a struggle for the many; policy options and whether it has to be a choice between economic growth and protection of people and the planet; and a global vision for the future.

Informing the debate will be the conclusions of the report of the Global Commission on the Future of Work, published in January, which includes proposals for policy-makers, workers’ and employers’ organizations. The high-level Commission was set up by the Director-General but its work remained independent.

The Tour then moves – via Brussels and Abidjan – to its fifth continent, the Americas. After inputs from Brasilia and Buenos Aires it turns north, through Washington DC to the UN Headquarters in New York for a ‘Centenary Fireside Chat’, where heads of UN agencies and other senior officials will discuss how the ILO’s work can intersect with other parts of the international system.

A final stop in Mexico City and, after a 23-hour whirlwind of debates, hopes and dreams, the webcast comes to rest at the ILO’s Regional Office in Latin America and the Caribbean, in Peru. There, a mural covering the entire ILO office building will be unveiled, ensuring the achievements of the past are permanently visible to inspire those building the world of work of the next hundred years.

The ILO’s centenary “Global Tour” will be webcast via www.ILO.org/tour from 00.00 GMT on Thursday 11 April.
INTERVIEW

L’Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie, défenderesse du multilinguisme

À l’occasion de la Journée Internationale de la Francophonie (20 mars), le représentant permanent de l’Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie auprès des Nations Unies, l’Ambassadeur Henri Monceau, a reçu UN Special.

Lors du dernier Sommet de la Francophonie, à Yérévan (Arménie), une nouvelle femme a été élue pour prendre la tête de l’Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie. Effectivement, après la canadienne Michaëlle Jean, c’est la rwandaise Louise Mushikiwabo qui devient la quatrième Secrétaire générale de l’OIF. Madame Mushikiwabo arrive avec des priorités fortes concernant notamment la jeunesse qui constitue une grande préoccupation dans le monde francophone. En effet, dans certains pays les jeunes représentent parfois jusqu’à 70 ou 80% de la population. L’autre grande priorité est le basculement de l’ensemble de l’espace francophone dans le numérique avec un souci particulier d’éviter les fractures qui concernent les pays les moins développés.

De quelle manière l’OIF intervient-elle à Genève ?
À Genève, l’OIF intervient d’abord en support de ses États-membres regroupés au sein du Groupe des Ambassadeurs francophones (GAF). Elle favorise la circulation de l’information et des idées ; participe au renforcement mutuel des capacités ; élabore des positions communes, déclinées sous la forme de déclarations ou de résolutions. Cette activité s’organise autour de cinq coordinations thématiques : les Droits de l’Homme ; le commerce et le développement ; le multilinguisme ; le désarmement et le numérique. Une partie de notre action sur la base de la langue commune ; ce qui est assez intéressant comme dynamique.

La Francophonie est parfois perçue comme la sphère d’influence de la France ?
C’est une confusion qui procède pour une part de l’homophonie entre le nom du pays et celui de l’organisation ; et sans doute, aussi d’une forme d’analogie avec les autres grandes organisations basées sur la langue : le Commonwealth, le Secrétariat général ibéro-américain ou encore la Communauté des Pays de Langue portugaise. À la différence de celles-ci, la Francophonie n’est pas née de l’ancienne puissance coloniale mais de jeunes États décolonisés. Une autre différence réside dans le fait qu’elle ne s’est pas construite autour d’une seule référence originale. La France joue un rôle déterminant, mais c’est aussi le cas du Canada, du Québec, du Sénégal, de la Suisse ou aujourd’hui du Rwanda. Il s’agit d’une organisation profondément et authentiquement multilatérale dont le réseau est distribué sur les cinq continents.

Catherine Fiankan-Bokonga
Qu’est-ce que l’Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie ?

Comment l’OIF a-t-elle vu le jour ?

À l’occasion de la Journée Internationale de la Francophonie (20 mars), le représentant permanent de l’Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie auprès des Nations Unies, l’Ambassadeur Henri Monceau, a reçu UN Special.
C’est exact. Certains responsables du Secrétariat des Nations Unies, et de la plupart des organisations internationales au sein du système de l’ONU, ne prennent pas en compte l’enjeu du multilinguisme. Celui-ci demeure trop souvent considéré comme une variable d’ajustement budgétaire. Pourtant nous atteignons une cote d’alerte. Désormais, des acteurs de haut rang du système ne peuvent s’exprimer et comprendre qu’une seule des six langues officielles des Nations Unies. Ce n’est pas acceptable. Pas plus que ne l’est le fait que plus de 90% du travail au sein des services et quasiment 100% des jurys de recrutement s’effectuent dans une seule langue. On ne peut pas coller aux valeurs d’universalisme qui sont celles de l’ONU si on fait passer le multilinguisme, la diversité des langues et des cultures, après les questions de logistique, de maintenance… Cette dérive charrie des conséquences largement impensées sur l’uniformisation du droit, l’incommunicabilité avec des populations entières, l’absence de représentativité de certaines sous-régions au sein des services et même l’accentuation des inégalités hommes-femmes. Il est grand temps de prendre ce problème à bras le corps et, notamment, d’exiger que tous les fonctionnaires de l’ONU aient, au moins, la connaissance active de deux langues parmi les six langues officielles et probablement une troisième de manière passive.

Le 20 mars est la Journée internationale de la Francophonie. Pouvez-vous partager quelques détails du programme ?

Cette date commémore la création de l’organisation. Il s’agit de célébrer la langue et cette présence au sein du système multilatéral. C’est l’occasion de mettre en évidence ce qui est de l’ordre des idées, de l’engagement politique, pour faire avancer le monde dans le sens des valeurs de paix, de solidarité et de diversité que défend la Francophonie.


Journée de la langue française à l’ONUG

Connaissiez-vous la chanson?

OLGA MARKIDES

Suite à l’expérience fructueuse de l’année dernière où, pour la première fois à l’Office des Nations unies à Genève, la Division de la gestion des conférences et le Centre pour la formation et le multilinguisme (CFM) célébraient la Journée de la langue française, cette année encore l’on entendra le Hall XIV résonner des beaux mots de la langue française le 20 mars entre 12 h 30 et 14 h 30.

En effet, traducteurs, interprètes et enseignants accordent à nouveau leurs violons et vous proposent un programme où les chansons prendront le relais de l’écriture pour vous faire fêter en musique la langue de Charlebois, Brel, Amadou et Mariam ou encore Eddy de Pretto.

Le français étant connu pour être la langue des chansons à texte, les enseignants du CFM ont organisé un concours ouvert aux participants des cours de français les invitant à imaginer la fin d’une nouvelle à choisir parmi deux œuvres d’écrivains suisses. C’est à l’occasion de la Journée de la langue française que les prix seront remis en fanfare aux lauréats qui auront su faire vibrer la corde sensible du jury composé de collègues issus des trois services, et que les textes récompensés seront lus pour le plus grand plaisir du public.

Ce sera ensuite à ce dernier de montrer qu’il connaît l’air et la chanson, et pourquoi pas la musique aussi, en répondant à un quiz interactif où il aura, entres autres questions, à compléter les paroles de grands classiques du répertoire francophone, reconnaître des airs chantés dans d’autres langues que le français, ou encore s’amuser des expressions empruntées au monde de la musique.

Ce programme sera parsemé d’intermèdes musicaux qui vous seront offerts par vos collègues interprètes et traducteurs, certes presque tous habitués à donner de la voix dans un micro, mais qui, cette fois, occuperont le devant de la scène pour vous faire découvrir en chanson plusieurs morceaux mettant, chacun à sa façon, le français en musique. Les paroles seront projetées sur un écran pour vous permettre d’en apprécier chaque mot et chaque note et qui sait, peut-être aurez-vous aussi envie de pousser la chansonnètre?

C’est d’ailleurs ce que vous serez invités à faire en deuxième partie, lorsqu’un karaoke vous attendra en même temps qu’un buffet, point d’orgue des festivités, régalé à cor et à cri et rendu possible grâce au soutien de l’Organisation internationale de la Francophonie mais qui ne serait rien sans accompagnement musical quand bien même la nourriture serait-elle une mélodie que l’on déguste par la bouche, comme disait Rossini.

Enfin, après le plaisir des oreilles et celui des papilles, ce sont vos yeux qui se régaleront devant un totem qui vous permettra de découvrir quelques extraits de comédies musicales en français en espérant qu’il vous donne envie de découvrir par le moyen du cinéma conjugué à la musique cette autre façon d’apprécier les sonorités du français.

Sans tambour ni trompette, vous voilà prévenus, à quelques surprises près, de la manière dont la Journée de la langue française sera orchestrée cette année à l’ONUG. Venez nombreux, si cela vous chante!

En prélude à cette journée, nous vous invitons à découvrir « Parlez-moi français », un très bel hommage à la langue française de Louis Caron, écrivain québécois : https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LZIUpElGFy4

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1 Section française d’interprétation et département de français du Centre pour la formation et le multilinguisme (CFM) de l’ONUG
Day of Cities
Meet the mayors who want to make their cities smarter and more sustainable
8 April, Room XVIII, Palais des Nations, Geneva

PAOLA DEDA, UNECE

Today, 55% of the world population is living in urban areas and, by 2050, this share will increase to 68%. In the countries of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), three out of four citizens live in cities. The current growth in the urban population is driven by an overall demographic increase and by the upward shift in the percentage living in urban areas, often moved by the economic opportunities that cities offer.

With such a percentage of population living in cities, and the related economic and social dynamics, it is clear that cities are playing an increasing role in addressing global challenges such as reducing the ecological footprint of their citizens, combating climate change, improving citizens’ lives through better work opportunities and a more vibrant economy. If we are not to leave anybody behind, in line with Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals, we need to work with cities. Sustainable development depends on the successful management of urban growth, especially in low-income and lower-middle-income countries where the most rapid urbanization is expected between now and 2050. A well-managed urbanization should consider the social and demographic trends in the long run and ensure access to infrastructure and social services for all, especially focusing on the needs of the urban poor and vulnerable groups.

The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe is aware of challenges faced by cities and their key role for sustainable development and has made Smart Sustainable Cities one of its four nexus areas, to which all the organization’s divisions are contributing. For this reason, the 68th meeting of the Commission Session this year will be discussing “Smart Sustainable Cities: Drivers for Sustainable Development”. In order to inform the session and to hear directly from mayors in the region, the Session is preceded by a special event, the Day of Cities, on 8 April 2019.

The meeting will be opened by Ms. Olga Algayerova, Executive Secretary of UNECE, Mr. Jean Todt, UN Special Envoy for Road Safety, Mr. Nikhil Seth, Executive Director of UNITAR and Mr. Sami Kaanan, Mayor of Geneva.

During two roundtables, mayors will discuss how to create smart sustainable cities, focusing on ways to improve the quality of life of people and the efficiency of urban operations, services and competitiveness. They will share their experiences and provide information on successful projects in their cities. Invited cities were selected on the basis of their work on, and dedication to, making their cities smarter and more sustainable.

The mayors and deputy mayors from the cities of Tirana, Glasgow, Milan, Oslo, Moscow, Helsinki, San Peters burg, Tbilisi, Helsingborg, Krimpen, Kir koros, Tampere, Jelgava, Alesund, Burgas, Ohird, Cascais, San Marino, Podorica, Celje, Annemasse, Bishkek, Kaluga and Osijek have confirmed their participation. More confirmations are expected as we get closer to the event. To see who will be there, and register to participate in the event, please check the website at: http://www.unece.org/housing/dayofcities.html

An exhibition and information fair will also showcase success stories from cities in the region and present useful tools that help to embrace smart and sustainable practices.

For more information write to: paola.deda@un.org

2019 - UPCOMING COMMONS ACTIVITIES

The Knowledge & Learning Commons is a joint initiative of the UN Library Geneva and the Centre for Innovation & technology

Meet the future: community creation and mainstreaming
doing more with less with Jabber and Office365”, from 12:30 p.m to 2 p.m., at the Library Events Desk with Jabber and Office365”, from 12:30 p.m to 2 p.m., at the LER B.135.

5 April - “The Gamelan: a collaborative musical workshop”, with the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Indonesia, workshops at 10 a.m and 2 p.m., at the LER B.135.

11 April - “Cooperative Excellence workshop”, with the Human Resources Management Service, from 12:30 p.m to 2 p.m., at the LER B.135.

15 April - MondayMotivation series - “Portable Office: work away from your desk with Jabber and Office365”, from 12:30 p.m to 2 p.m., at the Library Events Room B.135 (LER).

21 May - “Composite indicators as a tool to measure the progress towards the SDGs”, with the University of Geneva & UNECE, from 12:30 p.m to 2 p.m., at the LER B.135.

TO BE INFORMED ABOUT OUR UPCOMING EVENTS

For more information write to: commons@un.org
Until the 7th century, Arabic was a relatively obscure language that was chiefly spoken by nomadic tribes in the Arabian Peninsula and parts of Mesopotamia and the Levante. In fact, the word “Arabic” is derived from “Arabs”, which denotes people who were mostly “nomads”, living on the move with few exceptions of sedentary settlements in this region. Even though Arabic produced highly refined poetry that Arabic lovers still enjoy reading up to the present day, the fact that it was maintained orally and not textually impeded its expansion outside the Arabian Peninsula.

That changed in the 7th century. With the advent of Islam, Arabic travelled with Arabs as far as North Africa and Spain in the West; and made its way East to modern-day China. As it spread, Arabic took on a new quality which would be its hallmark ever after: a language of scholarship, cultural plurality and a conduit of exchange between civilizations. During that time, it came into contact with foreign languages like Latin, Roman and Persian and established itself as a leading language of science and knowledge. Through it, the valuable knowledge and philosophy of the Greeks were revived and handed down to future generations.

This cursory view of history pinpoints two truths that should be brought to the fore in any account of Arabic. Firstly, that the status of Arabic is linked to the rise and fall of the Arabs on the global stage. And secondly that, in spite of this link to Arab history, the universal character of Arabic attests to its openness to other cultures beyond the Arab world. It is a reminder that, once it crossed the boundaries of Arab ethnicity and geography, Arabic became a medium of cultural exchange for ideas and words to travel from it to other languages and back. One needs only to see how many Arabic words have found their way into English and how many English words were in return accommodated by Arabic. Words like “admiral”, “coffee”, “magazine” and “algebra” are lexical signposts of the healthy encounters that took place between the two languages and crystallize Arabic’s enduring legacy and the extent of its cultural impact.

In spite of some turbulent times currently faced by the Arab world, Arabic’s influence has anything but waned and its prominence cannot be underestimated in modern times. In statistical terms, Arabic is one of the six most spoken languages in the world. It is not only the language of worship of over one billion Muslims but it also a language of international affairs which is spoken in the United Nations, the League of Arab States, the African Union and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. Yet, Arabic is facing competition from various linguistic forms from within the Arab world that could challenge its status as the region’s lingua franca in the long run. These forms are varieties of Arabic which have developed alongside it, assuming a life of their own. Derived from Arabic, these colloquial forms commonly known as dialects have
succeeded over time in pushing Arabic out of communication in the household, the street and other informal settings.

Thanks to their closeness to standard Arabic, differences between these dialects are minor, even though they can sometimes be confusing to speakers coming from distant regions in the Arab world. It can be quite a challenge, for example, for a Qatari living in the eastern tip of the Arab world and who has no prior exposure to the dialect spoken in Mauritania on the other western end of the Arab world, to carry a normal conversation with a Mauritanian. Generally, it comes down to geographical distance and exposure, for a dialect speaker in one Arab country is more likely to understand and communicate with another dialect speaker in a neighboring country than one who comes from a faraway country. Yet a minimum amount of exposure suffices for any Arab citizen to communicate at ease wherever they travel in the Arab world.

A great impetus to Arabic came from the United Nations. Undeniably the recognition in 1973 of Arabic as an official UN language catapulted it onto the world stage and put it on a par with the other leading languages in the world. In order for Arabic to play its full role at the UN and to facilitate communication between Member States, the Interpretation Section and the Translation Section of the UN Office at Geneva (UNOG) provide respectively interpretation from Arabic to English and French and from a number of other languages into Arabic during meetings as well as the translation of parliamentary documents and publications. Language Days are a UN initiative to promote multilingualism and showcase the cultural treasures cultivated by its six official languages. The celebration of Arabic Language day, on 15 January 2019 at the Palais des Nations, was exceptional by all accounts. It was the first time that the League of Arab States came together with UNOG’s Division of Conference Management to organize a celebration event that was both intellectually stimulating and entertaining. This unprecedented cooperation between both sides was initiated by Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Sultanate of Oman His Excellency Mr. Abdulla Nasser Al Rahbi.

In front of hundreds of people, panelists took the floor to unpack the multifaceted nexus between Arabic language and Arabic culture and to shine a light on the role of Arabic in the UN. Among the speakers were the Director-General of UNOG Mr. Michael Møller, the Permanent Observer of the League of Arab States, Ambassador Ali Al-Sammak, the Permanent Representative of the Sultanate of Oman, Ambassador Mr. Abdulla Nasser Al Rahbi and the Director of the Division of Conference Management Ms. Corinne Momal-Vanian.

The audience also had a chance to listen to presentations on various topics ranging from fiction and journalism to the role of museums in the preservation of seminal Arabic texts. Other activities included calligraphy work, music performance and poetry reading.

Joint efforts by the permanent mission of the Sultanate of Oman, the Permanent Delegation of the League of Arab States and UNOG’s Division of Conference Management contributed to the success of this event, which is an annual reminder of the extent of our collective debt to languages as vehicles of understanding and cultural bridge-building between people from all over the world.
The negotiating process of the 2030 agenda – part III
Delivering the goals and targets

The transformational potential of the 2030 Agenda and its resonance in all parts of our troubled world could not have been achieved without a transformational negotiating process. This is its story in three parts.

NIKHIL SETH, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, UNITAR

The political process for negotiating the 2030 Agenda had two distinct phases. The first was the work of the Open Working Group (OWG), mandated by the outcome of the Rio+20 Conference (the OWG met from March 2013 – July 2014), and covered in previous issues of UN Special. In this edition, you will read about the second phase, the Inter-Governmental Negotiations, held at the General Assembly between January and July 2015.

Transforming the UN Charter

Before I begin with the Inter-Governmental Negotiations, let us take a step back and reflect on the 2030 Agenda and its significance. What is so special about this Agenda? After all, the UN has adopted so many declarations, agendas and platforms for action in its almost 75 years of existence. Why will the SDGs endure? To answer this question, I turn for inspiration to the UN Charter, which enshrines the hopes of humanity for peace and prosperity. It is inspirational and, after so many years, it is the bible of multilateralism. In the same vein, I often feel that the 2030 Agenda is also a transformation of the Charter into a plan with goals, targets and indicators.

The 2030 Agenda was created as the result of an awe-inspiring journey with unprecedented participation and ownership. When it was adopted, there was applause from every part of the General Assembly Hall – from governments of all different political hues and on different rungs of the development ladder, from the UN System, from academia, business and civil society. The Agenda has broken the north-south way of looking at issues, and instead embraced the future of our common humanity through the principle of universality. It has made sustainable development the business of everyone and has given a fresh flavour to the meaning of global citizenship.

What were the ingredients that brought us the 2030 Agenda? This is the story of the second phase of the negotiation process: the Inter-Governmental Negotiations at the General Assembly, January – July 2015, which shaped the post-2015 Development Agenda.

The post-2015 Development Agenda

The completion of the work of the OWG in July 2014 marked the end of Phase I, which had been both exhausting and exhilarating. Sixteen months concluded with an agreement on goals and most targets. But, many questions remained: an inspirational vision statement was needed for urgent political action; the means of implementation were still to be fleshed out; a follow-up and review process needed elaboration; and doubts had been expressed on the technical correctness of some of the targets, including the level of ambition. The 2030 Agenda itself had still to be negotiated, to which the goals/targets negotiated by the OWG would be appropriately attached. Here we entered the next phase, which defined...
the post-2015 Development Agenda.

As we entered the 69th General Assembly, under the Presidency of H.E. Sam Kutesa, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Uganda, there was change in the air. Ambassador Korosi, co-chair of the OWG, had returned to Budapest, and some member states saw the next stage as an opportunity to fix the “gaps and deficiencies” as politically perceived by them. The Troika system was no longer operational, and more traditional negotiations were threatening to replace all the OWG’s innovations. The preparation for the Addis Ababa Conference on Finance for Development was taking place in parallel, and the work of the Inter-Governmental Negotiations had to be completed in a limited time: within eight sessions of four days each, to be held between January and July 2015.

At the start of the Inter-Governmental Negotiations, three features injected greater optimism. First was the decision to continue with Ambassador Kamau as one of the co-chairs; second, the appointment of Ambassador Donoghue of Ireland as the second co-chair; and third, the positive momentum generated by the OWG. The excitement around the imminent 2030 Agenda was growing, and those who were waiting and watching the progress of the OWG felt the urgency of being part of this momentous end game.

Opening the consensus
The UN Secretary General’s synthesis report on the post-2015 Development Agenda was issued in December 2014. One of the most important observations in the report was the call for a technical review of the targets that emerged from the OWG, to achieve, at a minimum, consistency with existing UN targets. This observation provided a segue for many countries, especially those part of the West European and Other States Group (WEOG), to argue for an opening of the OWG “consensus”. These sentiments caused great disturbance within the G77 / China group (developing countries). There was a danger of extreme politicization of the debate. But once again, deft political leadership, openness to stakeholders and the momentum of the OWG kept the process on track.

Tying up loose ends
During the Inter-Governmental Negotiations, several loose ends had to be tied together. To start with, three ongoing parallel processes had an impact on the 2030 Agenda process: the Financing for Development, conference in Addis Ababa, the Statistical Commission working on the SDG indicators, and the Climate Change discussions leading up to COP 21 in Paris. Secondly, a declaration had to be negotiated to serve as a chapeau to the SDGs. Thirdly, the targets had to be approved technically. Fourthly, the chapter on financing and means of implementation needed to be aligned with the Addis outcome. Finally, the follow up process had to be clearly formulated. Let me summarize how each of these issues was handled.

How to implement the Agenda
The chapter in the 2030 Agenda on means of implementation was, as expected, one of the major disruptors. Traditionally, such has always been the case in development cooperation discussions at the UN. Compounding the difficulties were the parallel discussions on finance and technology at the Financing for Development conference in Addis Ababa, led by two different co-chairs: the Ambassadors of Norway and Guyana. The G77 group of developing countries took a negative view of the outcome at Addis, asserting that their requests had not been accommodated. On the technology side, an agreement to create a technology facilitation mechanism was viewed favourably by all. Finally, eleven paragraphs were agreed in the relevant section of the 2030 Agenda.

Tweaking the targets
The Secretary General’s report had highlighted some targets. First, there were nine targets that did not have clearly specified numerical percentages, referred to as “x” percent. In addition, some of the agreed targets were less ambitious than similar targets agreed to in different UN contexts. A total of 19 such targets were put before the Inter-Governmental Negotiations (IGN), with detailed justification for their revision. But politics as usual intruded. The G77 felt that to open up any aspect of the outcome of the OWG would be to risk opening up everything. The back and forth on tweaking the targets carried on until the final weeks of the negotiations. Finally, the logic of “tweaking” won out against the politics of no change to the OWG outcome, and we had a set of 169 agreed targets.

How to review the Agenda
The chapter in the 2030 Agenda relating to follow-up and review created further obstacles. Universality of the Agenda meant that all countries, including the developed ones, needed to subject their progress for review. Developed countries were not comfortable with the thought of reporting to the UN, and developing countries did not like the idea of a mandatory asymmetric review.

It was quite clear that the Universal Periodic Review model of the Human Rights Council was not going to fly, and that voluntary reviews would be more likely to find acceptance. Finally, it was agreed to establish a matrix of review processes at the national, regional and global levels, with the UN High Level Political Forum (HLPF), largely based on the target and indicator structure just agreed to, at the apex.

A new Agenda is born
On Sunday, 2 August 2015, the entire package was adopted to applause. It was a triumph for inclusion, innovation, openness and leadership. The world was now ready to adopt the 2030 Agenda in the presence of over 160 Heads of State and Governments in New York in September 2015.

This is the story of the backdrop, the innovations, the leadership and the controversies that were solved during this wonderful process. The sense of elation when the Agenda was adopted in September 2015 reminded me of June 1992, when Agenda 21 was adopted. It was a feeling of hope, goodwill and solidarity, a mood that has been difficult to capture in the three years since its adoption. Like the UN Charter, the 2030 Agenda will stand the test of time and will hopefully shift the trajectory of our world towards reduced poverty, increased equality, and environmental sustainability for a just and peaceful world.

I am indebted to Macharia Kamau, Pamela Charkin and David O’Connor and their book “Transforming Multi-lateral Diplomacy: The inside story of the Sustainable Development Goals”. I have drawn extensively from this accurate record.

2 Mr. Seth had a ringside seat, both as head of the UN Secretariat for the Rio+20 process, where the seeds of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs were sown, and head of the DESA support team to the inter-governmental process for the negotiation of the 2030 Agenda.
In the summer of 2018, I went on duty travel to Yerevan, the capital of Armenia, as part of my Programme’s work with a group of local researchers to finalize the papers which they had written following a year of research into critical aspects of tuberculosis (TB) control in the country. On day one, I caught sight of a billboard that said – 2,800 years of Yerevan, come celebrate with us. A quick Google search confirmed – forget Athens or Rome, Yerevan is even older!

The history of Yerevan dates back to the 8th century BC, with the founding of Erebuni in 782 BC by the Armenian King Argishti I as a fully royal capital. Most of us who have lived or live in what is called the New World are usually fascinated by the sheer age of many European cities from the Old World. I panicked! What can I offer to colleagues who live in a city so old that there is a story soaked in every stone?

Though a small country of just three million people, Armenia made global waves last spring with its Velvet Revolution – a months-long peaceful protest movement that eventually resulted in the resignation of the old government. This led to a snap election last December which was heralded as the first truly democratic election in the country since its independence from the Soviet Union.

We spent a week of long days reviewing papers, finalizing data analysis, discussing what the findings may mean statistically and practically, helping to peer review each other’s writing and trying to understand what the findings may mean for decision-makers. The rates of TB in the country are alarmingly high, with high prevalence of drug-resistant TB (DR-TB) forms, complicated by socio-economic and health system challenges.

Armenia is among the 18 high-priority countries fighting TB in the WHO European Region. Latest data show the main TB indices have declined, but the numbers are still above desired targets. Treatment outcomes are explained in part by the high prevalence of DR-TB forms. Despite successes in managing drug-susceptible
TB and the fact that Armenia is no longer a high-burden multi-drug resistant (MDR) TB country, DR-TB still poses a major challenge to the effectiveness of the National Tuberculosis Programme (NTP). The Armenian researchers and practitioners who were part of this Structured Operational Research and Training Initiative (SORT IT) have set out to improve health systems through research and help bend the curve of TB incidence in the country. While the local TB problem was clearly identified by participants during the workshop, the solutions, they said, had to be global.

And global it felt all along – the 2,800-year-old city had a real palpable global energy. One of the local mentors, an Indian doctor from Chennai who decided to stay after finishing medical school in Yerevan, finding a job teaching internal medicine at the state medical university, didn’t seem to feel out of place or awkward, even with his accented Armenian. A Chinese business executive in the international health research centre that hosted us for the week was pleased; although she felt they lacked authenticity, saying that the Schezuan Beef she ordered time and again had a distinct Khorovats flavour (an Armenian barbeque). The war in Syria led to an influx of 22,000 Syrian refugees of Armenian origin which resulted in Yerevan adopting a new mentality as well as new cuisine.

Many consider the culture in Armenia as being inclusive – another person joining a group or community is perceived as a positive. Armenians, like their South Caucasus neighbours, have long been renowned for their generosity to outsiders – a result of the country’s historical location on the Silk Road. The rich culture of the country is treasured and well preserved due in large part to its ancient history of being influenced by multiple empires, including Assyria, Greece, Persia and Ottoman-era Turkey.

On my last day of seminars with the group, having finalized a set of over ten papers ready to be submitted for scientific journals, I learned that the German Chancellor Angela Markel was in town on an official visit. The taxi driver taking me to the airport told me she made a surprise walk on downtown streets of Yerevan to breath in the city’s 2,800-year-old charm. I wondered how much of this was typical taxi driver urban myth and so I looked for it online. Sure enough, there she was on video, walking down the street with the country’s leaders. Chancellor Markel made a comment that when she was doing her research studies as a student in East Germany she visited Yerevan as part of an exchange programme. But the days of East and West in Europe are now long gone.

I debated what the title of this article should be; my dilemma being that most of us were raised hearing reference to the oldest cities of Athens, Damascus, Jerusalem and Rome, along with some other names of mysterious ancient cities which have long vanished, but Yerevan is never among them. My initial panic had now been resolved: if Chancellor Markel could feel at ease here and hold this beautiful old city in such high regard, celebrating its 2,800 year history, then so could I.
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*Premium for the group life insurance*

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