

Media Update

22 June 2021

United Nations

SECRETARY-GENERAL MESSAGE

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MESSAGE ON PUBLIC SERVICE DAY 23 June 2021

United Nations Public Service Day honors the hundreds of millions of public servants across the globe who dedicate themselves to ensuring the wellbeing of our communities. As the world continues to face the devastation of the Covid-19 pandemic, their work is more important than ever.

This year's observance highlights digital innovations in public services.

From telecommuting to online teaching to telemedicine, public servants have mobilized digital technologies to ensure the continuation of public services across all sectors despite the challenging and life-threatening circumstances of the pandemic.

Yet, while many governments have been able to move more and more of public services online, others have struggled. Globally, the digital divides persist. Not only do many people lack access to reliable broadband internet, but many others face barriers to accessing digital technology or don't have the skills needed to access and navigate online public services effectively.

As public service delivery becomes increasingly digital, we must ensure that public servants have the necessary skills. We must also ensure that all persons, including persons with disabilities and other groups

facing exclusion, are able to access to online services. We will fully achieve the Sustainable Development Goals only when no one is left offline.

As we mark Public Service Day, let us continue to recognize, support and invest in our public servants both on- and off-line. Let our public servants be empowered to serve.

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MESSAGE ON INTERNATIONAL WIDOWS' DAY New York, 23 June 2021

For many widows, losing their husband also means losing identity, land rights, property, income, and possibly their children. Their physical safety is at greater risk, just when they may be suffering serious emotional trauma.

Human rights, including the right to inherit and own property, should not be contingent on marital status. Inheritance laws and social safety nets should ensure that widows are protected and secure.

The COVID-19 pandemic has both increased the number of widows globally and exacerbated many of the challenges they face, including access to bank accounts and pensions. As governments provide economic and social support in response to the pandemic, they must consider the world's 250 million widows. Even before the pandemic hit, nearly one in ten widows lived in extreme poverty.

Social assistance, including cash transfers and pensions, can help support widows who are often left to take full responsibility for their families. Governments should make special efforts to ensure these measures reach women with low visibility, for example, those without identity cards or bank accounts.

I urge every country, as a critical element of my Call to Action on Human Rights, to pass and implement legislation and policies that promote gender equality, and to repeal all discriminatory laws that perpetuate women's subjugation and exclusion. The persecution and disinheritance of

widows, by law and custom, is one of the worst examples of gender discrimination.

On International Widows' Day, let's commit to making sure all widows occupy a respected place in our societies, with access to legal and social protection, so they can live their lives in peace and reach their full potential.
