

Statement by the Secretary General Thomas E. Garrett on International Women's Day

In March 2020, when we celebrated last year's International Women's Day, few anticipated the extent of the COVID-19 pandemic as a global health crisis. A year on, its significant impact is visible in all aspects of life, including gender equality. For women worldwide, the pandemic exacerbated gender inequalities in both the domestic and public domains. But the time of crisis also highlighted a powerful impact of women's leadership on handling the pandemic at all fronts, from global and local politics to healthcare to the economy. The theme of the 2021 International Women's Day, "Women in Leadership: Achieving an Equal Future in a COVID-19 world," is an opportunity to reiterate that closing gender gaps in economic, political, and social life are crucial to making our post-pandemic world more equal and inclusive, bringing benefits to all societies.

Partnered with its Working Group on Women and Democracy chaired by Member State Lithuania, the Community of Democracies remains committed to advancing women's participation in public life through several activities ranging from promoting greater inclusion of women in peace-building efforts, political life and highlighting the role of women leaders in times of crisis. Digital activities held by the Community of Democracies in 2020 gathered 141 experts, including 67 women, representing governments, civil society, youth organizations, and the private sector. Online events spoke to the importance of women's involvement in decision-making during and after the pandemic, highlighting how women are key drivers of the economic recovery from COVID-19. Another virtual discussion on "Women Leadership in Times of Crisis" gathered women ambassadors from the Member States Lithuania, Canada, Finland, and the United States, who underlined the critical role of women at the front lines of the crisis. Celebrating this year's #IWD2021, an event on "Feminist Foreign Policy in 2021", to be held on March 9, will feature women leaders from Lithuania, Canada, Sweden, and Mexico presenting feminist foreign policy in their countries.

Gender equality should be mainstreamed across all governance and policy areas, including traditionally male-dominated fields such as peace-keeping or foreign policy. The Community of Democracies will continue to promote the advancement of women's participation in democratic decision-making processes. To build inclusive societies, mainstreaming gender equality is the way forward.