



LE DIRECTEUR GÉNÉRAL

THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL

PALAIS DES NATIONS  
CH - 1211 GENÈVE 10

2 March 2020

Excellency,

I would like to bring to your attention the letter sent on 28 February 2020 by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Antonio Guterres, to the Chair of the 64<sup>th</sup> session of the Commission on the Status of Women. In his letter, a copy of which is attached, the Secretary-General referred to the advice from the World Health Organization about the global Coronavirus Disease 2010 (COVID-19) situation. He recommended that Member States decide to shorten and scale down the session, that all side events be cancelled and that capital-based representatives refrain from traveling to Headquarters for the session.

On the same day, I was informed by the Swiss federal authorities that due to the spread of COVID-19, the Federal Council decided to declare a “special situation” in Switzerland (as understood in the context of the federal law on epidemics), and to prohibit with immediate effect gatherings of more than 1,000 people. For meetings of fewer than 1,000 people, organizers were invited to assess the risks in collaboration with relevant Cantonal authorities. The Note Verbale sent by the Swiss Permanent Mission in this regard is also attached for your ease of reference. For its part, the Canton of Geneva has clearly indicated on its website that the decision to maintain a meeting or event rests with its organizers, who must consider postponing it, as far as possible, to a later date.

In light of the heavy calendar of conferences and meetings for 2020, postponing the rest of the 43<sup>rd</sup> session of the Human Rights Council would pose significant challenges. I am writing to suggest, therefore, that at its meeting today, the Bureau of the Council may wish to adopt a similar approach to that recommended for the Commission on the Status of Women. This would entail canceling all side-events, or at least those held in an enclosed space, and encouraging representatives to refrain from traveling to Geneva for the rest of the session. Likewise, those Special Procedures mandate holders who are not already in Geneva could be encouraged to participate in the session by video-conferencing.

I thank you in advance for your kind cooperation in this matter. Please be assured that my colleagues and I will support the Council in implementing its decision to the best of our abilities.

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

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'T. Valovaya'.

Tatiana Valovaya

Her Excellency  
Ms. Elisabeth Tichy-Fisslberger  
President of the Human Rights Council  
Geneva