

6 April 2018

**His Excellency Mr. Negash Kebret BOTORA (Ethiopia)**

**His Excellency Mr. Victor Arturo CABRERA HIDALGO (Ecuador)**

**His Excellency Mr. Kok Jwee FOO (Singapore)**

**Her Excellency Ms. Aviva RAZ SHECHTER (Israel)**

**His Excellency Mr. Vaqif SADIQOV (Azerbaijan)**

CC: Eric Tistoune, Chief of the Human Rights Council Branch of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

Dear members of the Consultative Group of the Human Rights Council,

The individuals and organizations addressing you through this letter support [GQUAL](#), a global campaign seeking to achieve gender parity in international tribunals and monitoring bodies.

We would like to encourage you, in your capacity as new members of the Consultative Group (CG) of the Human Rights Council, to take gender parity into account in the selection of mandate-holders for Special Procedure positions that will take place during your tenure. Particularly, we would like to respectfully request that, as a first act of business, you adopt “Guidelines on Gender Parity” to inform the selection process of Special Procedure mandate holders.

This would not be the first time that members of the Human Rights Council Consultative Group (CG) adopt these measures. In June 2015, the CG adopted “Guidelines on Gender Parity”, to address the gender disparity in the special procedure mandate holder selection process. The Guidelines recommended the establishment of gender targets that the CG would take into account for the approval of the short lists of candidates to be interviewed and presented to the President of the HRC for appointment.

The current underrepresentation of women in the Special Procedures undermines their legitimacy and impact of the mechanisms. They fail to be truly representative, and to adequately reflect the values of equality and non-discrimination. The CG has a fundamental role and the opportunity to change this.

According to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), as of 31 December, 2017<sup>1</sup>, women represented 44% of mandate holders. This figure drops to 39%, however, if we exclude the mandates that are strictly related to women’s rights and have been historically assigned to women, such as the Working Group on the Issue of Discrimination against Women in Law and in Practice, or the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women. Meanwhile, there are still several mandates that have never been held by women, including some with decades of existence, such as the Rapporteurs on torture, freedom of expression, and health. Women are also acutely underrepresented in several working groups. According to

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<sup>1</sup> [See](#) OHCHR website

data compiled by the [GQUAL Campaign](#), there are 16 mandates, out of a total of 56, that have never been held by a woman.

Without appropriate actions, the representation of women across these bodies will not necessarily increase in a linear or sustainable way. The impact of the Guidelines approved by the CG in 2015 is well documented. The reports of the CG from the 29th, 30th, and 31st sessions of the HRC each made explicit mention to the Guidelines when outlining the selection process for special procedure mandate holders. In those sessions, the CG considered applications for 11 Special Procedure positions, plus two positions to the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous People (EMRIP), a subsidiary body of the HRC. The 29th, 30th, and 31st sessions resulted in about 45% female appointees to Special Procedure mandates, and two more women were proposed by the CG and appointed by the HRC to the EMRIP. Overall, these sessions led to 56% female appointees.

Experience shows that progress in gender parity does not preclude the possibility of regression. Thus, to improve gender balance in the Special Procedures, it is of utmost importance that the membership of the CG adopts the same, or a similar, gender policy to guide its work, and recommends future members to maintain it.

Finally, a perusal of the candidates for special procedure positions shows that in some sessions there are not enough women candidates. For example, just 13 of 53 candidates for seven Special Procedures positions and two EMRIP positions, appointed during the 37<sup>th</sup> session of the Human Rights Council (26 February – 23 March 2018) were women.<sup>2</sup> In the case of the position for Independent Expert on the promotion of a democratic and equitable international order, all 8 candidates to replace a male Rapporteur were male. As a result, only 3 female experts were included in the list of candidates presented by the President of the Human Rights Council to fill in the 9 available positions<sup>3</sup>. This particular situation makes it even more pressing for the CG to approve Gender Parity Guidelines that ensure due consideration is given to the selection of women for upcoming appointments, and to encourage the OHCHR to take appropriate actions to avoid all male lists of candidates.

The Guidelines adopted by the CG in 2015 also addressed the concern of insufficient women candidates with specific requests to the OHCHR Secretariat, including by extending the deadline when not enough eligible women applied. We consider this an excellent precedent to increase gender parity amongst Special Procedure mandate holders and avoid all male lists of candidates.

Based on the above, we encourage you to build upon previous experiences, and lead with decisive actions to achieve gender parity in the Special Procedures in the upcoming appointments.

Sincerely,

**The GQUAL Secretariat:**

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<sup>2</sup> See [OHCHR website](#).

<sup>3</sup> See President List [here](#)

**Viviana Krsticevic**

**Maria Noel Leoni**

**Claudia Martin**

**Alexandra McAnarney**

**Alejandra Vicente**

**Louise Barrington**, Fellow of the Chartered Independent Arbitrator (CI Arb)

**Cherie Blair**, Founder and Chair of Omnia Strategy

**Agnes Callamard**, UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions.

**Josephine Dawuni**, Executive Director, Institute for African Women in Law.

**Agustina Del Campo**, Director, Centro de Estudios en Libertad de Expresión y Acceso a la Información (CELE), Universidad de Palermo

**Marcelo Ernesto Ferreyra**, Regional coordinator for Latin America and the Caribbean, Synergia

**Laurel Fletcher**, Director of International Human Rights Law Clinic, University of California Berkeley School of Law

**Nienke Grossman**, Associate Professor of Law, University of Baltimore School of Law

**Veronica Hinestroza**, Senior Programme Lawyer, International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute

**Susanna Hoe**, Writer

**Nani Jansen**, Director of the Digital Freedom Fund and Associate Tenant at Doughty Street Chambers

**Natasha Kennedy**, Head of Multilateral Engagement and Campaigns Sightsavers

**Caitlin Kraft-Buchman**, Women@theTable and Co-founder International Gender Champions

**Victor Madrigal-Borloz**, Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity and Secretary-General of the International Council for the Rehabilitation of Torture Victims (IRCT)

**Julissa Mantilla**, International Special Adviser on Transitional Justice with a Gender Perspective for the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women, UN Women

**Alexis Mourre**, President of the ICC International Court of Arbitration

**Patrick Mutzenberg**, Director, Centre for Civil and Political Rights (CCPR)

**Ariela Peralta**, Former President, Instituto Nacional de Derechos Humanos y Defensoría del Pueblo (INDDHH) de Uruguay

**Mirèze Philippe**, Special Counsel at the ICC International Court of Arbitration, Founding Co-president & Board Member, ArbitralWomen

**Silvia Quan**, Senior Human Rights Advisor for the Treaty Bodies Unit, International Disability Alliance

**Gabriela Rodríguez Huerta**, Director, Programa de la Licenciatura en Derecho y Programa de la Maestría en Derechos Humanos y Garantías del Instituto Autónomo de México (ITAM)

**Susana SaCouto**, Director, War Crimes Research Office at the Washington College of Law, American University

**Elizabeth Salmón**, Director, Instituto de Democracia y Derechos Humanos, Pontificia Universidad Católica Del Perú

**Fredrik Svensson**, Program Manager & Advisor International Law, The Swedish Foundation for Human Rights

**Phillip Tahmindjis**, Director, International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute (IBAHRI)

**Regina Tames**, Director, GIRE

**David Tolbert**, President of the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ)

**Emilia Vidak-Godjkovic**, Senior Associate at Omnia Strategy.



**International  
Disability  
Alliance**



**Women@TheTable**