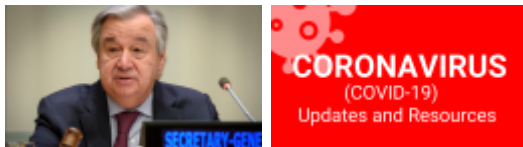


Monday, 9 March 2020 | Worldwide | Secretary-General

## Letter from Secretary-General to staff on COVID-19



📷 "I want to assure you that the health and safety of all staff, and of the people we serve, are at the core of everything we are doing to address the outbreak and the disruptions it has triggered."



Dear Colleagues,

Across the world, the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) has become a leading cause of upheaval today and concern for the future. At such times, it can be difficult to distinguish fact from myth, to determine what is prudent and what is panic, or simply to know how best to carry on with our work while caring for oneself and for others.

This is not the time to panic; it is the time to be prepared. Now is the moment for all governments, and all United Nations entities, to step up and do everything possible to contain the disease – and to do so without stigmatization and with full respect for human rights. While we cannot predict the trajectory of the outbreak, we

do know that there is no time to lose in preparing for what may come next.

With all of that in mind, I want to assure you that the health and safety of all staff, and of the people we serve, are at the core of everything we are doing to address the outbreak and the disruptions it has triggered.

We have established a Crisis Management Team under the leadership of the World Health Organization (WHO), bringing together experts from all parts of the United Nations system. The Senior Emergency Policy Team has been meeting regularly, as have the Medical Directors throughout the United Nations system and United Nations Resident Coordinators on the ground. A working group is assessing upcoming United Nations meetings given the potential risk of mass gatherings at this time. And across the world, we are in constant contact and complying with the relevant local authorities.

I have instructed all managers to act with urgency, follow guidance, and ensure that all duty stations prepare – and test – contingency plans and designate a COVID-19 Outbreak Coordinator. These efforts are necessarily multifaceted, covering critical areas such as infection control, business continuity, supply chains, travel, data collection, personal protective equipment, medical evacuation, psychosocial support and the troops that serve in our peacekeeping operations.

Access to accurate information is crucial. As there is much misinformation spreading on social media and elsewhere, I would encourage you to rely on guidance from trusted sources such as WHO, local health authorities, and our own internal medical services.

A hotline is in place for New York staff (3-9999) from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. on weekdays; staff broadcasts will continue; and inquiries may be made by email ([dos-dhmosh-public-health@un.org](mailto:dos-dhmosh-public-health@un.org)).

There are a number of practical steps that we can, and should, all take in our daily lives – and, in this regard, I urge you to consult these key resources:

- [Situation updates from the World Health Organization](#)
- [Recommendations developed by United Nations Medical Directors](#)
- [Information and guidelines specifically for United Nations personnel](#)

Preventing the further spread of COVID-19 is a shared responsibility for all of us around the world.

COVID-19 presents a significant challenge as we strive to continue to serve those who depend on the United Nations, while we manage our own risks. Working together, avoiding stigma and misinformation, and supporting affected colleagues will be key to minimizing the impacts of the virus on the effectiveness of the United Nations and on the health of our staff.

As the situation continues to unfold, senior managers and I will keep you updated on our contingency plans and other practical measures. The Crisis Operations Group is meeting in New York today to review our response in a broad range of issues and prepare administrative guidance, including regarding working arrangements.


Just weeks ago, at our global town hall meeting, we talked eagerly about our plans for this year. Much may now be unknown about what will and will not be possible amid an unfolding epidemic, but I know that our commitment is undiminished, and I thank you for your continued hard work and support as we pursue our shared goals.

Yours sincerely,

António Guterres

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See the coronavirus (COVID-19) information page on iSeek

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