

## Calling All Men: Gender Equality Isn't Just a Female Cause

Dr. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Time Magazine  
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*For International Women's Day, Dr. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, the U.N. Under-Secretary-General, urges men to make their mark by crossing the line united and joining women as a powerful force for gender equality*

Dear Men and Boys of the World,

You may be aware that there are almost 3.6 billion women and girls in the world. They are your sisters, mothers, wives, partners, daughters, nieces, aunts, cousins and friends. They have hopes and beautiful dreams for themselves, their families, communities and the world. If many of their dreams were to come true, the world would be a much better place for all of humanity.

Today I am writing this letter to you, because there are more than 60 million girls worldwide who are denied access to education. One in three women in the world is a victim of physical or sexual violence, the most humiliating and dehumanizing form of discrimination. Most of this violence happens at the hand of a partner or relative within her own home. Today two-thirds of the global illiterate population is women. If trends continue in this way, poor girls in Sub-Saharan Africa will not reach universal access to primary education until 2086.

So gentlemen, can we talk? I know many of you desire a better world for women and girls, a few of you are actively working on bringing about positive changes. We now have rising evidence that everyone, not just women, benefits from gender equality. Did you know that if women farmers had the same tools and fertilizer as men in agriculture, we would reduce hunger by up to 150 million people? Fortune 500 companies with the most women managers were found to deliver a 34 per cent higher return to shareholders. Discriminating against women comes at a cost to humanity and nations and denies women and girls their inalienable rights.

Yes, women are strong, bold, and brave, but men and boys also have a big role to play in ending gender inequality. It is both the right thing and the smart thing to do. Take action and influence change in society. We need your action and your voices to be louder.

As we celebrate International Women's Day on March 8th, I issue a call to men and boys and invite you to take action wherever you are and support the SHE Imperative. Make sure **SHE is secured** and Safe from gender-based violence. That **SHE** has her Human rights respected, including her re-productive rights. That She has **Economic Empowerment** through Education, participation and leadership.

This sounds simple, doesn't it? Yet if we applied this imperative, the world would be a very different and far better place. SHE would enjoy equal opportunity, access to education and no longer be the face of poverty, and her gender will not decide her status and place in society.

When we fought against apartheid, which the United Nations declared a crime against humanity, the whole world took a stand. All self-respecting people—leaders of nations,

religious institutions, commerce and sports—crossed the line to be on the right side of history.

The unity and purpose of the people of the world played a major role in ushering in freedom for South Africa and the release of Nelson Mandela, in whose cabinet I had the honour to serve. In Mandela, a force for good was unleashed, not just for South Africa but for all of humanity. He inspired those of us who worked with him, and countless millions around the world, to stand up for a just cause. He also emphasized that “For every moment we remain silent, we conspire against our women.” Now is your time to stand up for a just cause.

Men and women of the 21st century can make their mark by crossing the line united, and joining the women as a powerful force for gender equality. I invite you to join me and the women and men of the world who have led many long struggles for the gender equality.

In Africa, we have a saying that I want to leave with you: ‘If you go alone you go fast, but if we go together, we go far’. Let us go far together.

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