
International Women's Day 2016**Message by Dr Lassina Zerbo, Executive Secretary
CTBTO****8 March 2016**

International Women's Day is of the utmost significance to me – not only professionally, but also as a father to three girls and husband to a woman who has sacrificed part of her own professional career to be the rock of our family. For me, celebrating Women's Day means being appreciative and mindful of the road ahead where gender parity is achieved through common endeavour. It is a day that reminds all men that their mother is the first woman in their lives! The one who teaches empathy, building in all of us something we need: perspective and prospective.

March 8 is the day to celebrate all women around the world. To admire their strength, willpower, determination, creativity, and intelligence. To cherish the way they enrich our lives and shape the world as we know it.

Women were and are the driving force behind the ban on nuclear testing. The civil society movements that pushed for the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) in 1996 and its predecessors were to a large extent grounded in women's initiatives. We can never forget Dr. Louise Reiss, the scientist who helped to convince President John F. Kennedy to conclude the 1963 Partial Test Ban Treaty through her ground-breaking Baby Tooth Study.

I am particularly proud of the women working at the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO). They brave the elements in the world's remotest corners to build and maintain our monitoring stations, they work long hours to screen vast amounts of data for suspicious events, and they develop new methods of analysis and management practices. My sincere appreciation and thanks go to all of them, for without them we could not have become what we are today: the world's centre of verification excellence.

The CTBTO has now reached female representation of 43 per cent overall, and 35 per cent in the professional and higher positions. This is a good start for a highly technical organization active in traditionally male-dominated fields. These figures also represent a steady increase since 2010, but still, we can and must do better. Achieving full gender parity continues to be my firm resolve.

There is still a long way to go to achieve real equality on a global scale, where the gap is closing slower than anticipated only a few years ago: In 2015 the World Economic Forum estimated that it may take up to the year 2133 to fully close the gender gap.

This year's International Women's Day is under the motto of a pledge campaign for #PledgeForParity, to which everyone can contribute by pledging to make a concrete step to help accelerate gender parity. I invite you all to pledge under <http://www.internationalwomensday.com/>.

Just as the entry into force of the CTBT will close the door to nuclear testing, we also need to close the book on the old politics of gender. Achieving gender parity should not be just a dream. We need a new generation of men with a strong sense of empathy to tilt the balance of our current politics and make it a reality.

Together, women and men are the two wings of humanity; they must both fly in harmony.

May every day be Women's Day until we reach gender parity!

Lassina Zerbo

Executive Secretary