



*UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights*

[wg-business@ohchr.org](mailto:wg-business@ohchr.org)

&

*Secretariat of the UN Forum on Business and Human Rights*

[forumbhr@ohchr.org](mailto:forumbhr@ohchr.org)

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Dear Members of the UN Working Group and the Forum Secretariat,

**Strengthening the Forum's gender focus: IOE suggestion for the 2017 UN Forum on Business and Human Rights (27-29 November, Geneva)**

I am writing to you in my capacity as Secretary-General of the International Organisation of Employers (IOE) and as a Geneva representative of the [Geneva Gender Champions](#) network, which works to break down gender barriers.

Today marks [International Women's Day](#) with a message of #BeBoldForChange. This occasion challenges us all to better understand the barriers that women face at work, in law and in their communities and to think of ways to advance gender equality.

Much work is needed to achieve gender parity across the broad range of business and human rights issues. In my view, one powerful way to signal the importance of the gender lens would be to introduce a female-only speaker day at the [2017 UN Forum on Business and Human Rights](#) (27-29 November, Geneva). This could be backed by a challenge to all session organisers that the remaining Forum sessions are composed of at least 50 percent women.

Notwithstanding all the hard work in previous Forums to ensure that women are sufficiently represented, taking last year's Forum as an illustration, I have calculated that there were 159 male speakers compared with 140 female speakers (a 12% difference). Furthermore, nine of the 13 different stakeholder groups had more men than women. These included, arguably, the most important groups for such an event: those speaking in the plenaries and on behalf of business, civil society and affected stakeholders, Government, trade unions and the Working Group itself.

Having a female-only speaker day and a programme with at least 50 percent female speakers would send a loud signal that the UN Forum is seeking to redress an historical and global imbalance when it comes to public discourse. It would also enrich the discussions and help bring a much-needed gender perspective into the mainstream.

The UN Forum's core strength is its ability to convene a wide mix of stakeholders to demonstrate progress and challenges in the implementation of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. It is high time we hear from more women on this important topic.

The international community largely fails to ensure a critical mass of female voices across various fora. I urge the UN Working Group and the Forum Secretariat to be bold and push our community to practice what it regularly preaches.

Yours sincerely,

**LINDA KROMJONG**  
*Secretary-General, IOE*