



THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

8 July 2020

Dear New York-based Colleagues,

I am writing to provide an update on our plans for returning to the premises. Preparations for a phased return are progressing well and are expected to be completed soon. By then all buildings, including the annexes, will have undergone a deep cleaning, and signage and instructions guiding staff on physical distancing will have been posted to lower the risk of exposure.

With these measures in place, and assuming that New York City continues to meet the public health milestones for its phased reopening, the United Nations Headquarters in New York will transition to Phase 1 on 20 July 2020. During Phase 1, only those functions that need to be performed on site will be conducted on site. The vast majority of staff will continue to telecommute under the current alternative work arrangements. There must be a compelling reason for anyone to be present in the buildings.

In Phase 1, no more than 400 people should be at the Headquarters complex on any given day. To give some context, we currently have 200 to 300 personnel and delegates in the buildings each day, including those handling security, maintenance and cleaning. The potential increase to 400 in Phase 1 will therefore be quite small and will be determined by business requirements. The number of United Nations personnel in “annex” buildings (e.g., DC1 and 2) will be kept below 10 per cent of normal occupancy. Physical distancing will be strictly enforced for common spaces. Face-to-face meetings within offices will not be allowed without an individual risk assessment. Masks must be worn outside designated workspaces, and no catering services will be provided.

The Crisis Operations Group, in close collaboration with focal points from each Secretariat entity and from the Agencies, Funds and Programmes, recently concluded an assessment of which functions will be performed on site during Phase 1. Managers are working directly with those personnel who will come to the buildings during this period to coordinate the details. Guidelines will continue to be shared in the coming weeks, and a town hall meeting for all staff will be held later this month to respond to your questions and concerns. Information on the various phases is available on iSeek and at the COVID-19 website.

All United Nations Staff Members
in New York

What happens beyond Phase 1 will depend on the business requirements of our offices, as well as the personal circumstances of individual staff members. In Phase 2, we will gradually increase occupancy from 10 to 40 per cent. Phase 3, the “New Normal”, is being designed and will draw on lessons learned from the earlier phases.

I wish to assure you that your health and safety are my top priority. We will continue to review these arrangements and will keep you fully apprised in a timely manner of any further developments.

Updates will continue to be shared at www.un.org/coronavirus. The COVID-19 helpline (212 963 9999) remains in place, and the Department of Operational Support and Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance stand ready to assist as needed.

I again urge anyone with symptoms of COVID-19, test results or any health-related questions to contact the United Nations Division for Healthcare Management and Occupational Safety and Health using the confidential self-reporting portal (medical.un.org) or via osh@un.org. Be assured that all such approaches will be handled with confidentiality and privacy.

Thank you for your flexibility and commitment during these challenging times.

Yours sincerely,

António Guterres