



THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

21 April 2021

Dear New York-based Colleagues,

I am writing to provide an update on our phased return to the premises in New York. We currently remain in Phase 2 of our return, which sets maximum occupancy limits with current Host Government physical distancing restrictions.

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to cause massive disruption globally, and in every facet of people's lives. While the situation in New York continues to be of concern, there are signs of hope. Recent key indicators of the pandemic in the city point to improvement compared to my last update in February. Yet, with COVID-19 still spreading and the effects of the variants unknown, we must remain vigilant and continue to apply all the safety measures we have put in place.

The roll-out of the vaccination programme in New York has allowed many personnel and their families to be vaccinated, thus protecting themselves and their communities. While COVID-19 vaccination is voluntary and not a requirement for return to the physical workplace, I encourage all of you and your families to receive the vaccine, so that we can recover better together from this pandemic.

In February, I mentioned the commencement of the planning and design of the post COVID-19 Next Normal for Headquarters. The cross-functional project team recently submitted to me a comprehensive set of recommendations. I have requested some further work, including the conduct of a staff survey, before finalizing the plan. I encourage all of you to complete the survey when you receive it.

Our transition from Phase 2 to the Next Normal will be gradual and based on a constant risk assessment that will also take into account and adapt to New York City and State regulations and the easing of restrictions. Please note that the previously-issued policy guidance on who is required to return to the workplace at Headquarters for Phase 2 remains in effect, though updated guidance will be circulated shortly. Personnel required to be present in-person include those required to perform essential on-site functions and who are not in high-risk groups.

All United Nations Staff Members in New York

In addition, those expressing a preference to work on site are welcome to do so, as we are still well under the maximum occupancy limits and can safely accommodate more staff at this time. That said, you will still need to get approval from your entity focal point to be on the premises, as we must ensure that the required six-foot distancing is maintained on individual floors. Managers should also continue to exercise flexibility, understanding and care when discussing options with their personnel.

Considerations regarding how best to bring about the gradual increase of presence in the workplace are ongoing. The New York Occupational Safety and Health Committee will continue to develop options for this transition, and will hold a town hall meeting in May to share these options and address your questions and concerns.

I would like to assure you that the extensive physical risk mitigation measures in place throughout our premises in New York have been effective and have led to a decrease in risk levels to low. Maximum occupancy limits for proper physical distancing and other safety measures, such as the requirement to wear a face covering, will remain in effect for as long as needed to support the safety and health of all United Nations personnel.

I understand that many of you would like to make plans for the coming months, including those related to childcare, vacations and other logistics. Although we do not yet know for certain when we will enter our Next Normal, it is not expected to be before September. You should therefore feel comfortable to plan accordingly.

I am deeply aware of the impact the prolonged pandemic is having on mental health and well-being, which we continue to address.

I would like to, once again, express my thanks to you. I must commend the dedication and commitment of all of you, and of our essential front-line colleagues in particular who have been present on site since the start of the pandemic, to ensure the continuation of our work here at Headquarters in New York and around the world.

Yours sincerely,

*with my warmest personal regards*



António Guterres