

UN Commission on the Status of Women Closes with Renewed Commitment to Gender Equality

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The 65th session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), the foremost intergovernmental body dedicated to gender equality, came to a close on Friday, 26 March 2021, after negotiations on the text of the agreed conclusions stretched into the final day of the conference.

The Women's Rights Caucus (WRC)—a global coalition of more than 200 feminist organizations, networks, and collectives that advocates for gender equality at the United Nations—advocated throughout the negotiation process for the CSW outcome to:

- Be inclusive of experiences of all women, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, employment, HIV status, race, financial or social status, as well as those who are migrants, internally displaced, or indigenous;
- Uphold sexual and reproductive health and rights;
- Uphold women and girls' economic justice;
- Recognize diverse and various forms of families which exist around the world;
- Support representation of all women in the women, peace and security agenda of the UN;
- Recognize different forms of gender-based violence and intersectional discrimination including racism, homophobia, transphobia, denial of access to sexual reproductive health care services; and
- Support women's human rights defenders and end impunity for threats, harassment, killings, and reprisals against them.

The WRC welcomes the adoption of the agreed conclusions and the renewal of a global commitment to achieving inclusive gender equality. The consensus shows multilateral support to advance the human rights of all women and girls.

Despite pushback from regressive governments, WRC welcomes several key areas of progress, including explicit calls for:

- **Recognition of opportunities and threats posed by online platforms** which have enabled women's and girls' participation and access to decision-making spaces, but need further measures to ensure that women and girls can use those spaces without threats of violence and harassment.
- **New commitments to address the gendered impacts of COVID-19**, particularly among women and girls who experience multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, and to take stronger action to mitigate them.

Despite progress, a number of states and anti-rights civil society actors continue to disrupt constructive and plural dialogue with attacks on human rights language and opposition to truly advancing a gender equality agenda. This year we saw anti-rights actors infringe on many side and parallel events, using

discriminatory language and disruptive tactics in an attempt to co-opt, distort and undermine our rights. We are particularly outraged by the intensified anti-trans rhetoric and mobilization. UN Women and NGO-CSW must ensure a safer space for all during the CSW, especially communities and movements that have historically experienced marginalization and violence.

The WRC is also concerned about increasing challenges to civil society participation in the CSW and other UN spaces, which was amplified by COVID-19 restrictions. The continuing problem of the shrinking civil society participation was even more visible this year due to the virtual nature of CSW. Civil society represents communities on the ground and is a crucial resource of information as well as a watchdog keeping states accountable for their commitments.

The WRC comments:

“We are encouraged by the international community reconfirming its commitment to gender equality. However, commitments mean nothing without action. The WRC calls on states to ensure that commitments are followed by swift action and mobilization of public resources. Neither sovereignty nor culture, tradition or religion can be used in bad faith to not comply with governments’ obligations to respect, protect and fulfill the human rights of all women.”

The feminist movement will continue to work alongside those who share our vision and seize the opportunity of the upcoming Generation Equality Forums. These events provide the opportunity for cross-regional and global advocacy to focus resources and political will into a progressive and just agenda for gender equality that truly leaves no one behind.

The sustainability of our feminist agenda demands an intergenerational perspective that recognizes and reaffirms the voices, agency, and leadership of young women and girls in all their diversity, and commitment to address structural inequalities and systemic barriers that violate their rights and limit their potential.

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