

21 December 2020

Mher Margaryan  
Chair of the Commission on the Status of Women  
Permanent Representative of the Republic of Armenia  
119 E 36th St, New York, New York 10016

Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka  
UN Women Executive Director  
220 E 42nd St, New York, NY 10017, United States

Cc: Jo Feldman, Ahlem Sara Charikhi, Na Sang Deok

Dear Ambassador Margaryan and Ms. Mlambo-Ngucka,

On behalf of sixty-six\* civil society organizations, we are writing to share our recommendations with regard to civil society participation in the 65th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women.

As you know, the CSW has traditionally been the largest annual global gathering on gender equality and women's, adolescent girls' and girls' human rights and is an important space not just for shaping global norms and standards on these issues, but in building solidarity between different stakeholders and strengthening feminist and women's rights movements. We value deeply the role that the Commission plays in advancing global commitments on women's, adolescent girls' and girls' human rights. We know that robust engagement from feminist and gender justice organizations and movement has been a key driver in that progress, precisely because of our unique role in both advocating with governments to be bold and ambitious and holding them to account. Yet, we have also seen how the trend of closing of civic space at the country level and the global level, including at the CSW, has undermined our influence and jeopardized our work. For many of us, COVID-19 has accelerated this trend. CSW65 is an opportunity to reverse course and once and for all place feminist and gender justice organizations at the center of our collective work to advance gender equality and realize women's, adolescents and girls' human rights.

As you plan for CSW65, we ask that you consider the following:

- Establish a task force with regionally diverse feminist and gender justice organizations to identify and select civil society speakers for all official plenary sessions and panels. In doing so, we would suggest using regional processes with respective UN economic and social commissions as a mechanism for collating recommendations for civil society speakers.
- Establish the practice of giving equal space to governments and civil society. Alternate government and civil society speakers in plenary and panel sessions to allow for an

exchange of diverse views and foster greater opportunities for interaction and meaningful engagement.

- Establish mechanisms for the virtual participation of government and civil society representatives on official delegations in the negotiation of the Agreed Conclusions and other resolutions under consideration, from the first reading. As you know, it has been a struggle to engage delegates from Capitals in negotiations that typically take place before the CSW starts; this is an opportunity to shift that dynamic and establish a new best practice to enable their early and active participation. In doing so, the time difference must be taken into account to create an enabling environment, especially for those located in the global South to actively and meaningfully participate.
- Ensure that all CSW online forums and spaces are inclusive, accessible and feminist in design; they should include reasonable accommodations for people with disabilities, and multi language interpretation, ensuring the robust participation of women from the global South, grassroots movements, and those who have historically been on the margins of civic space.
- Work with UN Women country offices to help to bridge the digital divide and facilitate access to technology and create other opportunities (for example, by opening UN Women offices to advocates, with respect for COVID-related precautions) to ensure diverse participation by women, girls and gender justice advocates, including those living in rural areas, people with disabilities, indigenous communities and others who experience marginalization or discrimination.
- Allow negotiations to be observed by registered civil society organizations and consider opportunities for comment, in a similar way to negotiations on political declarations for the HLPF.

We have never had a virtual CSW before, but in this new era, it likely will not be the last. We have an opportunity before us to broaden participation, especially for those facing financial and visa-related obstacles for traveling to New York, including intersectional feminist activists, women human rights defenders and organizations from the global South, and to develop new best practices for engaging civil society and representatives from capitals. This would ensure that the Commission continues to be an inclusive, inspiring and relevant space.

We would also urge the Bureau, along with ECOSOC, to consider this as an opportunity to reopen discussions about the future of the CSW and its working methods to ensure more robust civil society and global South engagement moving forward, for example by creating or making space for a civil society seat on the Bureau and in decision-making related to the CSW or enabling virtual participation on an ongoing basis.

We stand by to assist you with this critical task.

Sincerely,

Action Canada for Sexual Health and Rights, Canada  
African Women's Development and Communication Network - FEMNET, Kenya

Afrihealth Optonet Association (CSOs Network), Nigeria  
AIDOS - Italian Association for Women in Development, Italy  
ARC International, Global  
ARROW, Regional - Asia-Pacific  
Asia Pacific Alliance for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, Thailand  
Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development, Thailand  
Asia Pacific Women's Watch (APWW), Asia Pacific  
Association For Struggle Against Sexual Violence, Turkey  
Canadian Labour Congress, Canada  
Center for Egyptian Women's Legal Assistance, Egypt  
Center for Reproductive Rights, US  
Coordinadora de la Mujer, Bolivia  
DAWN (Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era), Fiji  
Diverse Voices and Action (DIVA) for Equality, Fiji  
Dr Uzo Adirieje Foundation (DUZAFFOUND), Nigeria  
Effe rivista femminista, Italy  
Equality Rights Alliance, Australia  
Equidad de Género: Ciudadanía, Trabajo y Familia, Mexico  
FEDERACIÓN PLANIFICACIÓN FAMILIAR ESTATAL, SPAIN  
FEIM- NGO CSW LAC, Argentina  
Feminist Task Force, Global  
Generation Initiative for Women and Youth Network, Nigeria  
GIRWL, Europe  
Global Alliance for Tax Justice, Kenya  
Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR), MENA region  
International Planned Parenthood Federation, Global  
International Women's Health Coalition, USA  
International Women's Rights Action Watch Asia Pacific (IWRAP AP), Malaysia  
Ipas, USA  
Ipas México y Centroamérica- Ipas CAM, Mexico and Central America  
IPPFWHR, United States  
ISHR, USA  
Kyiv Institute of Gender Studies, Ukraine  
LGBTI Equal Rights Association for Western Balkans and Turkey, Western Balkans and Turkey  
Make Mothers Matter, Switzerland  
Mama Cash, the Netherlands  
Midwifery Society of Nepal, Nepal  
Mujer Y Salud en Uruguay - MYSU, Uruguay  
ODRI Intersectional Rights, Chile  
OutRight Action International,  
Planned Parenthood Federation of America, USA  
REPEM LAC, Bolivia  
Resource Center for Women and Girls, Kenya  
RESURJ, Brazil

RFSL - The Swedish Federation for LGBTQI Rights, Sweden  
Rozaria Memorial Trust, Zimbabwe  
Save the Children,  
Sawa for Development Association, Lebanon  
SERVAS INTERNATIONAL, FRANCE  
Society for Conservation and Sustainability of Energy and Environment in Nigeria (SOCSEEN),  
Nigeria  
Soroptimist International, United Kingdom  
The Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR), Egypt  
UDSR/DURS (Urban development and social researches Association, Turkey  
Urgent Action Fund for Women's Human Rights, USA  
WECF International, Women Engage for a Common Future, the Netherlands  
Women Enabled International, Global  
Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO), United States  
Women's Health in Women's Hands CHC, Canada  
Women's Major Group, Global  
Women's Working Group on Financing for Development, Global  
Women's Coalition - Turkey, Turkey  
Youth Coalition for Sexual and Reproductive Rights, Philippines  
YWCA Australia, Australia  
Zamara Foundation, Kenya

**\*Additional organizations signing on after sending the email on 21 December 2020**

Gestos – HIV, Communication and Gender, Brazil  
FEMNET - African Women's Development and Communication Network, Kenya  
Balance Promocion para el Desarrollo y Juventud AC, Mexico  
Gender-Centru, Republic of Moldova  
PA women's organization Alga, Kyrgyzstan  
National Alliance of women human right defenders, Nepal  
Federation for Women and Family Planning, Poland  
Women's International Peace Centre, Uganda  
The YP Foundation, India  
WO=MEN Dutch Gender Platform, Netherlands