

## CSW70 PRIORITIES DOCUMENT

The Women's Rights Caucus (WRC) is a global coalition of over 800 organizations working to advance women's human rights in their communities and at the United Nations. It is co-convened by FEMNET, Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD), Outright International, Young Feminist Caucus, and Fos Feminista.

The WRC presents this Global Priorities Document on the 70th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW 70), held under the priority theme: "Ensuring and strengthening access to justice for all women and girls, including by promoting inclusive and equitable legal systems, eliminating discriminatory laws, policies and practices, and addressing structural barriers."

Formal equality is often undermined by entrenched patriarchal norms, and women, girls, and gender diverse individuals face compounding barriers to accessing justice. Access to justice remains one of the most critical yet unequal frontiers for women, girls, and gender-diverse persons. It encompasses not only the ability to access courts and legal remedies, but also to transform the systems, resources, and conditions that enable women, girls, and gender-diverse persons to claim their rights, seek redress for violations, and participate meaningfully in shaping the laws and policies that govern their lives.

This means that justice cannot be measured solely by the number of cases prosecuted or judgments delivered; it must be measured by how it changes lives, restores agency, and dismantles systems of power that sustain discrimination. We see CSW70 as a crucial moment for advancing feminist justice worldwide. The WRC has outlined critical barriers that impede women, girls, and gender diverse individuals' ability to access justice, including:

1. **Discriminatory legal frameworks:** Examples include restrictive laws on sexual and reproductive health; criminalization of LGBTIQ+ identities; guardianship systems that limit the autonomy of young people; family laws that privilege men in custody or inheritance and customary laws that favor male heirs and impose barriers to women's land ownership.
2. **Weak implementation and institutional failures:** In some contexts institutional failures involve police being discouraged or discouraging survivors from reporting cases of gender-based violence, a mismanagement of evidence and case backlogs delays justice for victims of such violence. Institutional barriers are further reinforced by the underrepresentation of women in justice systems. Furthermore, judicial bias and a lack of gender-responsive procedures or limited survivor-centered protection mechanisms can further harm victims and discourage them from seeking justice through formal mechanisms.
3. **Structural, socioeconomic and resource inequities:** Many women and girls simply cannot afford to seek justice; the costs of legal representation, court fees, and transportation are often prohibitive. These are barriers for many women to seek justice for discrimination and violence perpetrated against them. Rural women have difficulty reaching courtrooms because of cost and infrastructure. Women's economic dependency on their families or partners reduces their willingness to seek justice, and language and literacy barriers for minority groups make the legal system difficult to navigate.
4. **Customary, religious, and informal systems:** In some contexts, male-centered customary inheritance and land systems discriminate against women. Informal mediation is favored over formal justice, and in some cases, religious courts deny women's divorce or custody rights. Social pressure discourages women from reporting discrimination for violence against them, and the limited recognition or invalidation of women's testimony

discourages them from seeking redress. Furthermore, restrictions on women's movement impedes their ability to access justice.

5. **Cultural norms and gender stereotypes:** Examples include the normalization of domestic violence as a family matter; victim-blaming and community stigma against survivors of sexual- and gender-based violence; child marriage, dowries and widow rites; gender stereotypes influencing legal decisions in court rooms; and violence or harassment against women who resist patriarchal cultural norms.
6. **Criminalization and state repression:** Individuals are criminalized based on their sexual or gender identity. Sex workers are targeted through punitive laws, and NGOs are restricted through the incorrect implementation of assembly and protest laws. Feminist activists and human rights defenders are surveilled and harassed both online and offline. Individuals report state-led moral policing and censorship of feminist and human rights-based messages.
7. **Digital exclusion and inequity:** Women and girls experience unequal access to digital devices, data, and connectivity. Women human rights defenders and feminist activists experience online harassment and surveillance. The digital divide leaves rural and marginalized women without access to technology and information on their rights. The lack of accessibility of digital tools and the slow adoption of digital regulation systems leave women and girls without avenues to seek justice.

In light of these barriers, the WRC is calling on Member States to consider the following in the CSW70 agreed conclusions:

1. **Transformative legal systems:** Conduct legal audits to remove discriminatory laws and practices. Repeal colonial-era penal codes. Guarantee equal marriage, divorce, and inheritance rights. Adopt survivor-centered and trauma informed gender-based violence legal definitions that extend beyond punishments for perpetrators.
2. **Strengthen justice institutions:** Mandate intersectional gender training, and create specialized sexual and gender-based violence courts nationwide. Increase the representation of marginalized groups in judiciary systems. Expand free legal aid and paralegal networks, and create complaint and oversight bodies for judicial abuse.
3. **Ensure bodily autonomy and sexual and reproductive health and rights:** Legalize and ensure access to self reproductive health services. Establish rapid judicial mechanisms for cases involving SRHR abuses. Guarantee emergency contraception and SRH services in times of crisis or conflict. Protect healthcare providers from criminalization. Harmonise age of consent laws to allow adolescents to access SRHR services without requiring third party consent in respect to the principle of evolving capacity.
4. **Advance economic and social justice:** Fund state-run legal aid and survivor services; Ensure economic reparations for survivors of violence, including access to housing, education, and employment; Implement ILO C190 and workers' protections. Recognize unpaid care work through social protection mechanisms. Ensure protections for informal, migrant, and LGBTIQ+ workers.
5. **Strengthen feminist data and accountability:** Collect intersectional, gender-disaggregated justice data. Publish GBV, femicide, and legal access statistics. Fund feminist research and community accountability monitoring. Integrate feminist data into national policymaking, and ensure ethical protections in data collection.
6. **Protect feminist movements and defenders:** Adopt national human rights defenders protection laws and end the use of morality and security laws against activists. Provide emergency funds, shelters, and digital safety tools. Protect civic and digital spaces for organizing, and prevent harassment of feminist organizations.

7. **Leverage technology for justice:** Develop multilingual e-justice platforms. Create mobile apps for violence reporting. Invest in digital literacy for women and girls. Strengthen online safety protocols, and use technology to bridge rural-urban justice gaps.
8. **Finance feminist justice:** Establish national budgets for feminist justice systems. Increase core, flexible funding for feminist groups. Create regional feminist litigation funds. Invest in community paralegals and grassroots structures. Shift from short-term projects to long-term funding.

Overall, justice must be transformative, intersectional, and survivor-centered. States must commit to dismantling systems of oppression. Investing in feminist movements is essential to ensure that justice is lived, not promised