

Feminist Cross-Coalition Statement on CSW70 - Defending Gender Equality in the Multilateral Space

We¹ strongly applaud the decisive demonstration by Member States, civil society and feminist movements defending multilateralism and negotiated norms and standards to advance gender equality that took place during the close of the 70th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW70).

On the last day of the CSW70, the room witnessed two unprecedented actions by the United States. In a first for the normally-uncontroversial resolution on *women, the girl child and HIV/AIDS*, they called for a vote. Afterwards the United States presented a standalone resolution intending to define “gender” under a narrow, binary understanding of “men and women”. Both initiatives were rejected by a majority of Member States.

After failing to secure agreement during the Agreed Conclusion negotiations, and following the defeat of their amendment during their adoption, the United States introduced a standalone resolution entitled “Protection of women and girls through appropriate terminology.” This initiative sought to reinvent the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action by including language that does not exist in Annex IV to the 1995 Report of the Fourth Conference of Women — namely, that gender should be understood as meaning “men and women.”

This is factually inaccurate. Annex IV did not define “gender,” nor did it establish that the term refers to “men and women.” It reflected the outcome of an informal contact group and was never adopted as negotiated language by Member States. The failed U.S. resolution brazenly attempted to impose a meaning never intended by Member States, threatening the integrity of the Beijing Platform, undermining decades of feminist advocacy, and setting a dangerous precedent for anti-rights actors.

The introduction of this resolution illustrates a concerning strategy: to reintroduce contested interpretations through alternative procedural avenues. The fact that this effort reached the floor at all is, in itself, cause for concern.

For gender equality, the implications would have been significant. Across the United Nations system, the concept of “gender” has evolved through decades of practice, jurisprudence, and policy frameworks, both before and subsequent to Beijing. This reflects the lived realities of women and girls in all their diversity. Attempts to narrow this understanding are of grave concern. They erase lived realities, undermine hard-won progress, and constitute a rewriting of history and threatening decades of precedent aimed at establishing a comprehensive interpretation of gender.

After the resolution was presented, Belgium called for a “motion for no action” – a rare procedural move to not consider or vote on a text – on the grounds that this initiative was factually incorrect, was brought forward unilaterally, and done so without consultations with the membership. The

¹ We are coalitions of individuals and/or organizations committed to working at the international level to protect and promote the human rights of all people through an intersectional feminist lens, and together comprise hundreds of individuals and organizations from across the globe.

“motion for no action” passed with 23 votes in favor, 3 against and 17 abstaining. This prevented the US resolution from proceeding.

By ending the adoption through a motion for no action, Member States stood firmly in support of multilateralism, and against any unilateral, retroactive attempt to erroneously write into history a definition of gender. By doing so, they reaffirmed the integrity and credibility of agreed frameworks. The message was clear: the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action cannot be unilaterally re-drafted. It is a testament to the power of feminist movements and civil society.

While we celebrate this win, we are well aware that these tactics will not stop here, and that the implication of this initiative being brought forward in other ways extends beyond this single vote. The dynamics we have seen at this session are not isolated. They are part of broader, coordinated ongoing efforts by anti-rights actors to revisit and reshape established commitments.

Moreover, a number of Member State interventions following the vote underscored that efforts to promote restrictive and binary understandings of gender remain very much present. This reinforces the need for continued vigilance.

We will not, however, allow decades of progress on gender equality to be rolled back through interpretations that were never agreed to.

We, as feminist movements and civil society, will relentlessly work with allies across the United Nations system and beyond to ensure that these re-interpretations do not take hold.

We call on Member States to remain consistent in upholding agreed frameworks, to ensure that international commitments continue to be interpreted and applied as they were agreed.

The strength of the multilateral system depends on the credibility of its commitments. Accuracy matters. Process matters. Precedent matters.

Gender equality, rights based norms globally, together with the integrity of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action — and the rights it protects — is what keeps women and girls around the world safe and protected.

We will not allow anyone to speak for us and our priorities.

Signatories

1. Asia Pacific Regional CSO Engagement Mechanism (APRCM)
2. Ecofeminist Network for Latin America and the Caribbean
3. Global South Coalition for SRHR and Development Justice
4. International Domestic Workers Federation
5. International Transport Workers Federation
6. International Trade Union Confederation
7. International Sexual and Reproductive Rights Coalition (ISRRC)
8. Latin American and the Caribbean CSO Engagement Mechanism
9. Lesbian Bisexual Trans Intersex Caucus
10. Major Group for Children and Youth
11. MenEngage Global Alliance
12. Pacific Feminist SRHR Coalition
13. Public Services International
14. Women's Major Group
15. Women's Rights Caucus
16. Young Feminist Caucus