

2017 Young Feminist Caucus Statement at the Sixty First Session of the Commission on the Status of Women

Preamble

We are a diverse group of young feminist advocates, gathered in New York at the Sixty-First Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), working for gender, reproductive, economic, ecological, and social justice and political transformation. In this time of growing conservatism, massive youth unemployment and underemployment, rising global inequalities, and shrinking spaces for civil society, the theme of this current CSW, “Women’s Economic Empowerment in the Changing World of Work,” could not be more prescient. Economic justice and equal opportunity is central to ensuring gender justice. Thus, governments must draw on the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and its review documents to mainstream a gender analysis that is youth-focused into all discussions of economics.

The economic empowerment of women, girls, and young people cannot be addressed without discussing the linkages between economics, bodily autonomy, sexuality, climate change, development, and multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination that negatively impact women, girls, and young people in diverse ways. Furthermore, young women and girls should not be instrumentalized as a tool for economic development; our human rights must be central to any discussion involving us and our economic empowerment. We strongly encourage the Commission to increase youth-friendly language that acknowledges the centrality of human rights for women throughout the life cycle, from girls to young women to women, in the Agreed Conclusions. We demand a holistic, cross-cutting, rights-based approach to the challenges that young people face around the world today.

Therefore, at CSW61, we call on governments to implement the full list of youth key priorities below.

Macroeconomics and Trade

Rising global inequalities are a threat to the human rights of women, girls, and young people and are directly caused by macroeconomic policies such as conditional development lending, unenforced taxation and tax dodging, inequitable free trade agreements, deregulation, and extractivism. We call on governments to uphold their obligations to fulfill social and economic rights for all by investing in policies to transform economic realities, instead of offloading these responsibilities onto the private sector. Governments must ensure regulation around worker's health and safety and hold corporations accountable for their actions throughout the global supply chain both in countries of operation and countries of registration.

Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

Sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) are critical to ensure economic empowerment for women, girls, and young people. By enabling youth to make well-informed decisions on our sexuality, including with whom to engage in sexual activity; if, whether, when and with whom to have children; and how to freely express our identity, youth are able to enact our right to full autonomy over our bodies as well as our universal right to health, empowering us to continue our education and work in the future. To ensure the fulfillment of all young people's SRHR, we call on governments to:

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- Recognize — in policy, practice, and funding — the central role SRHR play in health equity, human rights, and development, while ensuring the inclusion of these rights in all national policies and emergency response strategies.

- Legislate in a health-, rights- and evidence-based manner by repealing discriminatory laws and policies such as parental and spousal consent laws, laws that criminalize safe abortion, and laws that criminalize individuals on the basis of age, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, sexual practices, HIV status and transmission, and labor choices, including sex work.
- Uphold comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) as a cross-cutting component to respect and guarantee the rights of all young people and push forward CSE programmes that are receptive to our needs.
- Provide youth friendly, accessible, affordable and comprehensive SRHR services to all young people; including youth living in or fleeing from fragile and humanitarian/emergency settings.
- Ensure that all SRHR-related service provision is youth- and adolescent-friendly, providing accessible spaces free from stigma and discrimination. These services should be tailored to the needs of young people and should be covered in a sensitive, holistic and non-discriminatory manner.

Multiple and Intersecting Identities and Discrimination

Our diversity is our strength, and there is no one-size-fits-all solution to ensure economic empowerment for women, girls, and young people. We demand an end to all forms of discrimination, on the basis of age, sex, class, race, caste, ethnicity, geographical location, health status (including HIV and mental health status), ability, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, sex characteristics, marital status, parenthood, diverse forms of families, indigeneity, migrant or refugee status, and others. We recognize that youth experience multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and that all responses and policies to ensure gender equality and economic empowerment must tailor solutions to address the diverse identities youth hold. We call on partners and allies, including men, boys, older generations, faith and traditional leaders, to support the diverse youth-led and women-led movements and organizations in the fight for gender equality and economic justice.

Climate Change and Justice

The future of women's and young people's paid and unpaid work will be irrevocably changed by the existence and escalating threats of climate change. The current growth-led economic model directly contributes to climate change and the associated violations of human rights that disproportionately affect women, girls, and young people. We call for a just and equitable transition to sustainable energy and industries that challenge the gendered division of labour, recognising that women often work in low emissions yet low waged, insecure and informal employment, including subsistence farming, service industries and domestic, care and sex work.

We demand that governments recognize that ever-growing numbers of women, girls, and young people will be displaced by climate change and related conflicts and pushed into the informal sector as migrants and refugees; thus, states must commit to providing services and creating policies that protect, respect, and fulfill their human rights. Finally, a just and equitable transition must prioritize an equitable redistribution of resources, including land, property, sustainable and environmentally safe development, technology, capital, and finance, including divestment from fossil fuels and reinvestment into renewable resources and community-based solutions that mitigate and adapt to climate change.

Meaningful Youth Participation

Young people, all with our own different skillsets and capabilities, have the fundamental right to meaningfully and fully participate in all decision-making processes. Meaningful youth participation should be particularly prioritized when creating programs or policies that have a direct impact on our lives, including

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peacebuilding and conflict prevention. Therefore we urge Member States to include meaningful youth participation in all stages of decision-making: during formulation, development, implementation and evaluation of laws policies, plans and budgets. To ensure meaningful and equitable youth participation, governments must provide access to accurate information and non-formal training, including through the use of appropriate and accessible media and information-communication technology, which will build and attain certain professional skills for employability. We call on Member States to provide technical and financial support to youth and to prioritize sustainable, flexible funding for youth-led organizations to fully develop our potential.

Education

We urge the implementation of policies that actively promote skills-training opportunities for women, girls, and young people, irrespective of gender, to foster our economic emancipation and workplace inclusion. Governments must prioritize the education of young women, adolescents and girls and strengthen policies and programmes that ensure equal access to longitudinal education for all young people. We emphasize the importance of gender inclusive and accessible quality education with relevant curricula, including CSE and mentorship and skills development, which will prepare young women, adolescents, and girls for decent work, equitable employment opportunities, and entrepreneurship. We urge governments to train educators on gender-sensitive policies and practices to end discrimination and stigma in academic settings.

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Employment and Labour Rights

Economic independence and equal rights to economic resources are fundamental for women, girls and young people's empowerment. We demand that governments uphold labour rights, including the right to collective bargaining, the guarantee of a living wage, paid parental, vacation, and sick leave, worker's compensation, and overtime pay. These legal and social protections must be extended to workers, including migrants and those working in low waged, insecure and informal employment, including subsistence farming, service industries, domestic, care and sex work. Governments must recognize that women and young people disproportionately make up the workforce of these precarious sectors and take urgent action to ensure their safety, including by preventing sexual harassment and violence in the workforce. We insist that governments enforce equal pay for equal work and encourage equitable gender representation in all professions, specialities and leadership positions and ensure that young women and girls do not bear the burden of unpaid care work. Governments must also support the development and use of accessible and appropriate information and communications technology as a resource for the economic empowerment of youth including young women. Lastly the crisis of vast youth unemployment and underemployment must be urgently addressed, as it causes young women and marginalized groups to be disproportionately and unjustly affected and left behind.

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Gender-Based Violence

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a violation of human rights and a significant barrier to women's, girls', and young people's economic empowerment. We demand that Member States strengthen their response to GBV, putting into action the measures outlined in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Governments should pass laws to make sexual coercion and domestic violence illegal and should provide survivors of GBV with safe, affordable, accessible, and youth-friendly health services, including mental health services and sexual and reproductive health services, including safe abortion. Furthermore, governments should commit to public education to raise awareness on GBV and promote strategies to address and prevent it. Governments must develop and strengthen mechanisms including the use of media monitoring to combat the use of information and communications technology and social media to perpetrate violence against women and girls, including its criminal misuse for sexual harassment, sexual exploitation, child sexual abuse material and trafficking in women and girls, as well as emerging forms of violence such as cyberstalking, cyberbullying, and privacy violations that compromise the safety of women and girls and undermine our ability to benefit from the use of information and communication technology and social media. We further urge governments to introduce policies to protect young feminist activists and human rights defenders, and to bring perpetrators of violence and discrimination to justice.

Conclusion

In order for women, girls and young people to be economically empowered, we believe it is necessary to fully integrate all the above priorities across all implementation strategies including the Sustainable Development Goals, ILO conventions, ICPD Program of Action, Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and binding human rights treaties. Each process must be monitored with data disaggregated by gender and age and other necessary information in order to monitor inequalities and discrimination across intersectional identities. We urgently call on governments to create opportunities for meaningful youth participation in decision-making processes and policies to ensure our priorities are heard and implemented. Technical and financial support, including flexible, core and long term funding, must be provided for youth led organisations at the local and international level.

Rising inequality, climate change, and regressive policies are transforming the world of work for young people. While progress has been made on gender equality, immense obstacles remain. Furthermore, many young people do not have the opportunities older generations had for secure employment, fair labour protections, and civil society engagement. The global concentration of wealth and power, closely linked to the global erosion of democracy, equality, and justice, critically endanger the future of today's youth - our future. We as young feminists reject the message that we are unimportant, inexperienced, and naive, or that we are merely instruments for countries to maximize growth and profit for a few at the expense of many. We are powerful rights-holders willing to fight to implement the above priorities that together make up our **#YoungFeministVisions** of a just, equitable, and compassionate world.

**We urgently call
on governments
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*#Young
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Visions*