



Socialist International Women

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Gender Inequality in the World Today - Understanding the New Challenges and Ending Gender Inequality by 2030

Resolution

We are at a decisive moment in the history of the global women's movement, a moment when we seek to make equality concrete and effective, rather than a utopia. Looking at progress toward gender equality across the world, one sees in some countries regression, in others stagnation, and in the great majority a failure to reach the goal. While 189 nations subscribed to the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995, more than 21 years later no country has achieved gender equality in reality – even where the principle of parity is respected – notably in the economic and political fields.

Conflict, war, the economic and financial crisis, the rise of extremism and fundamentalism, cultural resistance and climate change have of course had a serious impact on the outcome of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that so much had been expected of, even when they did not render them entirely nugatory, as in certain countries. To revitalize the MDGs and transform the world, we committed ourselves, with greater hope, for the post-2015 period, to an ambitious social contract, a new way forward represented by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and a global climate change agreement.

Social democratic governments have been able to avert the grave problems that have afflicted very many countries, thanks to the values and principles on which they were founded: liberty, equality, peace, democracy, social justice and solidarity. These values, which are the foundations of the social well-being of men and women need to be more widely shared and diffused in a world in quest of solidarity, peace, dialogue between cultures and civilisations, and the peaceful settlement of conflicts.

Uniting our forces for education for all

Education is a precondition of personal and economic development, the maintenance of peace, and equality of the sexes. Remarkable progress has been made since the signature of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989. Yet millions of children, the majority of them girls, are still deprived of their right to education – the vehicle of equal opportunity, of combat against poverty, of economic growth, of health, and of a popular well-being transmissible from generation to generation.

According to UNICEF, “about 124 million children and adolescents are denied opportunities to enter and complete school, including around 59 million children of primary school age”. If things continue as they are, in 2030 “more than 60 million primary school-aged children will be out of school”. How then could one hope to eliminate poverty and achieve sustainable development?

Uniting our forces for a world of equality and justice for women

Women’s full participation in every sphere of society and their real access to power and decision-making are preconditions for equality, the elimination of poverty, and sustainable development. Despite the progress made over the last decade, in many countries today cultural and religious beliefs perpetuate traditional practices (early and forced marriage, female genital mutilation...).

Inequality between men and women remains the most common violation of human rights that impacts on the poverty level. According to the World Bank, extreme poverty has indeed fallen, the number of people living below the poverty level falling to less than 10% of the world population in 2015. Earlier fixed at \$1.25 this has risen to \$1.90. Yet this is nothing to celebrate, for regional disparities are disturbing. Asia and South America have made undeniable progress compared to Sub-Saharan Africa, which accounts for 50% of the very poorest, who must survive on less than \$1.90 per day or look for more promising prospects through emigration.

Women are also the first victims of climate change. Their survival depends on natural resources, whose exhaustion intensifies inequality and leads to an increase in violence against women. Women’s empowerment and their participation in the implementation of environmental protection programmes is thus crucial to the eradication of poverty and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Uniting our forces for gender parity in politics and decision-making

Women’s access to decision-making power is a cornerstone of the fight against poverty. Giving them the power of social, economic and political decision, the power to act, rather than silencing their voices, is a certain means to improving the social, sanitary and economic circumstances of all, of their families, their communities and their countries.

The Beijing Platform for Action set a target of 30% for the proportion of women in national parliaments. Since the launch of the Platform in 1995, it has to be said that an undeniable effort has been made in many countries to promote women’s participation in politics and in decision-making and to deal with their under-representation by schemes of positive discrimination enshrined in law or even in constitutions.

In 2015, parliamentary elections were held in 58 countries. Of these, 28 operated gender quota systems, covering 34 legislative chambers in total. In these, 28.3% of seats were held by women. The 30 countries having no form of quota (covering 36 legislative chambers) achieved a bare 13.5%. Gender quotas, when respected, seem to have a positive impact on the election of women to parliament.

Sixteen women are national leaders, 6 in Europe, 5 in Asia, 3 in Africa, 1 in the Americas and 1 in Oceania, meaning that fewer than 5% of the world's countries are led by women. On 1 January 2016, women were presiding officers in 17.9% of legislative chambers: 32 presiding over single or lower chambers, 17 over upper chambers – encouraging figures, but not enough in a world in which, of a population of 7.4 bn in 2016, 3.6 bn are women, who are responsible for two-thirds of all hours worked, produce more than half of all food, earn only 10% of total income, own less than 2% of the land, and receive less than 5% of all bank loans.

Women have made breakthroughs in many fields, but at the present rate of advance it would take another century to achieve gender parity in governments and parliaments.

Uniting out forces for peace, reconciliation and sustainable development

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) insists on women's right to participate on equal terms with men in every field. UN Security Council Resolution 1325 of 2000 and succeeding resolutions on Women, Peace and Security recommend that women be involved in conflict prevention and resolution and call for their participation in peace-building so as to better protect them against violations of their fundamental rights and to afford them access to justice and to anti-discrimination services.

Women and their children are the first target in conflict and war. The kidnapping of girls and women, sexual violence and sexual slavery have become the weapons of terrorists who even go so far as to justify them. Girls and women in Nigeria, Mali, Cameroon, Chad, Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and in many other countries afflicted by extremism, terrorism and the return of obscurantism, have paid the price of this, and continue to do so; young girls are used as human bombs. Human rights and economic and social development in the Sahel have suffered severely from the traffic in human beings, chiefly women and girls, the traffic in drugs, and the rise of religious extremism and terrorism.

Yet women remain excluded from reconciliation and peace-making processes. Many peace processes over the last decade have marginalised women completely: Somalia (2002), Ivory Coast (2003), Nepal (2006), the Philippines (2007) and the Central African Republic (2008). No women played a part in these, as signatories, mediators, witnesses or negotiators.

All talks aimed at peace, mediation and reconciliation marginalise women. According to UN Women, the percentage of women among participants in peace talks has remained low, never even reaching 10% following the adoption of the Resolution 1325. States in conflict, and also states intervening as mediators, should take all necessary measures to protect women, before, during and after conflict, and involve women, on equal terms, in all decision-making processes concerned with the establishment and maintenance of peace. The efforts of the African Union (AU) are encouraging, among them the training of women for roles such as peace mediator, and the appointment of a Special Envoy for Women, Peace and Security. But a crucial element is missing: specific funding for women, peace and security.

In the Middle East, certain conflicts endure, every attempt at peace seeming to fail, as in the case of Israel and Palestine. Other more recent conflicts have led to appalling

civil wars, notably in Iraq, Syria, Yemen and Libya. The rise of fanatical terrorist groups (Daesh/ISIL, Boko Haram, etc.) in these countries continues to make victims of thousands of civilians. Murder, torture, rape, and the enslavement of women and ethnic minorities are everyday events. Human rights activists, among them many women, are kidnapped, imprisoned and murdered almost every day.

Wherever it occurs, conflict leads to population movements as people seek to escape death, violence and famine. Syria and Sub-Saharan Africa have seen terrible humanitarian crises and enormous flows of refugees. The Syrian refugee crisis is the most serious humanitarian emergency of the 21st century. Almost 10 million people have been displaced, 6 million of whom have sought refuge abroad, chiefly in Europe and the Americas.

Uniting our forces to safeguard the rights we have won

The 21st century will be decisive for the global women's movement. Everywhere in the world, advances have been made, rights won by dint of activism while yet others may be hoped for, but the difficult global situation suggests that we would be right to fear the loss of gains already made.

The Arab-Muslim countries, and also countries of the West, are threatened by the growing power of fundamentalism and religious extremism, which threaten religious freedom, further deepen gender inequality, put women's rights into question, promote the stigmatisation of religions and cultures, and drive our societies toward xenophobia, Islamophobia and racism.

The migrant crisis, terrorism and religious fanaticism have encouraged the rise of populisms and the far Right in Europe and elsewhere in the world. Electoral discourse draws on them and political programmes are constructed around rejecting refugees, immigrants, Islam, the hijab and fanaticism, and challenging abortion rights. Today, in the most highly developed countries, in Europe and the Americas, abortion rights won by years of struggle are in danger.

Aware of the threats to the rights already won, and of the many obstacles that still stand in the way of the real gender equality without which sustainable development will remain no more than a utopia, Socialist International Women appeals to the member parties of the Socialist International and to their governments:

- to adopt the gender parity mechanism within the Socialist International, so as to encourage social democratic governments [to follow suit] and to align our discourse [sic] with our values and principles;
- to revitalise international cooperation in order to share the best of progressive endeavours in the way of solidarity, fighting poverty, and sexual equality, so as to improve the living conditions of women and children in developing countries, especially in rural areas and in conflict zones;
- to promote the establishment of international networks to support women's leadership and political equality and to promote gender parity in decision-making bodies and posts of responsibility in all countries;

- to engage in effective partnerships with government, civil society, the private sector and international organisations, aimed at gender equality, education, productive employment, decent work and empowerment for women, the breaking down of stereotypes, and women's full participation in institutions and decision-making bodies;
- to promote the effective application of the principle of equal pay for equal work in order to combat gender segregation in the jobs market;
- to ensure that preventive measures and legislative provisions regarding violence, rape, sexual abuse and all other forms of sexual violence afford women sufficient protection and respect their dignity and integrity;
- to ensure girls' right to an education, so that they may enjoy the best opportunities for personal development and empowerment; and
- to support initiatives to bring about women's participation in peace processes and fight the intolerance and the obscurantist ideas that endanger democracy and our harmonious coexistence within society.
