



Socialist International Women

Council Meeting

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Social Protection Systems, Access to Public Services and Sustainable Infrastructure for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls

RESOLUTION

The Socialist International Women (SIW) warmly welcomes the priority theme of CSW63 “Social Protection Systems, Access to Public Services and Sustainable Infrastructure for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls” and strongly supports urgent action to resolve the critical issues involved. The incorporation of this pattern in the Socialist International already signals that the debate about gender equality is maturing. This is forged daily in the internal discussions in each country and in the global movement by the affiliated socialist countries. The expansion of this debate provides fertile ground for the launch of the "All for 50-50 equality" Campaign. 30% was the minimum, now we are fighting for fairness, for 50% participation of women in power and decision-making. We know that many comrades are joining in this struggle, which is why we are calling on all socialist and feminist men to join in a single voice with the Socialist International of Women in this representation. To participate is to guarantee the representation of our demands, our vision of the world and the future we seek. Social inequality and deepening of forms of exploitation of work demand new strategies to confront the impacts of capitalism in its different stages of development.

SIW is deeply concerned that the human right to social security, which is recognised by several international legal instruments, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, is currently not a reality for 55 per cent of the world’s citizens, amounting to four billion people*. It is an unacceptable fact that the majority of women, men and children worldwide have no social protection at all despite their distress. Billions are experiencing extreme suffering without support in times of acute vulnerability such as during childbirth, illness and in old age and struggle alone during sustained periods of severe financial crisis. In addition, only 29 per cent of people worldwide have access to the full range of public services required to ensure their safety, health and wellbeing*. The majority of the population are provided with only minimal levels of basic support, such as one-off emergency cash payments, which means suffering and deprivation are only partially eased. Sustainable solutions are urgently needed in social protection to provide support in order to give hope for the billions of citizens in desperate need. Social protection as a response to the demands of workers' movements must fulfil a dual role. In addition to guaranteeing the basic social rights of access to public health, welfare and prevention policies, it must aim to develop a critical conscience in workers to mobilise resistance movements.

Women and girls remain the least socially protected group worldwide while they are unable to access public services. Gender inequality denotes a deepening of the forms of exploitation and oppression of women, not only in the labour market, but also in all areas of daily life. This impact is shown by the greater exposure to risk and social vulnerabilities. Despite this there have been progress in some regions, such as improved maternity benefits and pension provisions. This shows the conquests made by women’s movements around the world, despite the barriers imposed on their effective political participation.

Unfortunately, there have also been worrying regressions, particularly in the years since the 2009 financial crisis. Austerity measures involving cuts and restricted public services have harmed and damaged women in many ways: increasing women's poverty also by driving them out of public sector jobs, closing or reducing access to sexual and reproductive services, health, maternity and baby care services; weakening support for the victims of violence ...These regressions must be halted; women's rights and needs are far too important to be pushed aside when the political mood changes. It is essential that social protection of women and girls is consistently in the global political spotlight and urgently prioritised. We urgently need to stop the advance of conservatism in national governments so that the backward steps cease, and we can return to previously achieved levels which are threatened in this global context.

Where social protection systems exist, one of the reasons women are being failed is that they do not take into account the harsh realities and limitations of many women's daily lives. Women continue to perform the majority of household, childcare and extended family care duties. This leaves many isolated from potential social resources because they cannot leave their homes or neighbourhoods, or have no means of travelling anywhere to access them. Many also have little or no money of their own, so even low access costs, such as a bus fare, will automatically exclude many women. There is an urgent requirement to ensure that income transfer programmes are conceived as a guaranteed right, as a commitment to more equal income distribution, opposing the extreme concentration of wealth in the hands of a few families. While such a measure is insufficient, it marks a clear position taken by socialist parties regarding the process of distribution of socially produced wealth, although it still requires guaranteed access to other free and good quality public goods and services for the whole population.

The other major barriers to social protection inclusion are gender restrictive cultural norms, which control women in their movements and activities. Marriage, in particular children and forced marriages, divorce, becoming widowed or losing the presence of a partner as they leave to find work elsewhere can also result in women and girls becoming extremely isolated and vulnerable.

Ensuring funding for appropriate infrastructures is essential to enable women and girls to access social protection and public services easily and affordably. In practice this can take many forms such as mobile medical and maternity units, providing community transport services or increasing childcare provision. The solutions to gender inclusiveness exist but in far too many cases are not explored or implemented. The urgent challenge is to push global political will into taking action to fund and implement programmes which give affordable social protection access to all. As well as the tireless work of local groups and NGOs we now have the power of video footage, international media and social media, which can all be harnessed to keep pushing forward and ensure that women's voices are heard. This is vital work. When women and girls are broken and un-supported as millions worldwide today are on a daily basis our global family loses invaluable wisdom, skills, talents and knowledge that cannot be replaced. Women have proven they are crucial in maintaining peace and providing social cohesion and are perfectly capable of governing communities and nations. A balance in the world is urgently needed. This must start right now with honouring our sisters and brothers worldwide as equals.

Women themselves know what would benefit them. The unfortunate fact is in many cases they are never asked and are never given an opportunity to speak. SIW firmly believes that the root of lasting change is to empower women and to encourage political participation of women to ensure that gender sensitive issues are raised and social protection systems are fit for purpose for women and girls. When women and men work together as equals, each contributing their point of view to the table, we have the beginnings of genuine gender equality, which benefits the whole global community. Changes in culture take time but if we work in solidarity, continually pushing against that which binds women, the required changes are

achievable. Therefore, the ISM calls upon all socialist parties affiliated to the SI to add strength and power to the fight for equality.

SIW asserts that there is an urgent need to reaffirm commitment to rapid progress on addressing the social protection needs of women and girls. Without gender equality in social protection it is impossible to create gender equal societies, which are the foundation of sustainable prosperity and peace worldwide.

In support of increasing the provision of public services and social infrastructure and improving inclusiveness of social protection systems for all women and girls SIW calls on its members and affiliated groups to:

- *Respect* the principles of human rights and decent work when devising and implementing policies on social protection and public services.
- *Incorporate* specific social protection and public services goals and recommendations for inclusion and access of women and girls within local and national party manifestos to ensure social protection issues remain high on political agendas.
- *Challenge* accepted norms in social protection systems, which exclude or ignore the needs of women and girls, including issues of provision, access and affordability of essential public services such as maternity healthcare.
- *Urge* the allocation of sufficient financial resources at government level to ensure all members of society, including women and girls, have adequate social protection and strongly challenge any erosion of such funding.
- *Collect* qualitative data by gender and quantitative data broken down by gender, in accordance with international standards, which will be used to monitor and evaluate social protection policies, modify them and design new policies that are more gender-sensitive.
- *Remind* and educate communities and regions of the contribution of women and girls to social and economic prosperity to help change cultural perceptions and create a continuing dialogue of valuing and honouring women and girls.

* https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_601903/lang--en/index.htm