



# Economic and Social Council

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## Commission on the Status of Women

Sixty-fourth session

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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”

### Statement submitted by Women Deliver, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council\*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

The momentum for gender equality and women's and girls' health and rights is strong and growing. Twenty-five years after the adoption of the landmark Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, government leaders, corporations, and institutions – as well as advocates and activists – are using their power to drive change for a more gender-equal world. Fierce and tireless advocacy has been key in getting us this far – and it will be key to getting us where we still need to go. In our current political climate, with conservatism on the rise and intense pressure to walk back women's and girls' health and rights, it is clear that advocacy and movement-building are more needed than ever. Now is the time to double down, commit to coordinated action and cross-cutting partnerships, and stand together and assert that we will not go backwards.

As the sixty-fourth session of the Commission on the Status of Women begins its work, it is critical for governments to reflect on progress, but also to make serious commitments to achieve the full promise of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Importantly, governments must stand up for gender equality and the full spectrum of women's and girls' health and rights – and this means pushing back against political pressure that threatens to limit this agenda. It also means focusing on three critical areas.

First, governments must prioritize and uphold women's and girls' sexual and reproductive health and rights, including the right to safe abortion. This means elevating and integrating sexual and reproductive health and rights in policies, programmes, and investments – at home, and abroad. Sexual and reproductive health and rights are the bedrock of gender equality, and are vital to a world in which women and girls have full and equal opportunities to achieve their fullest potential. Research shows that a gender-equal world is healthier, wealthier, more productive, and more peaceful – but we don't get to a gender-equal world without full realization of women's and girls' sexual and reproductive health and rights.

In the last year, the global community witnessed extreme and targeted attacks on sexual and reproductive health and rights, and United Nations processes were no exception. This challenged meaningful progress for women and girls at the sixty-third session of the Commission on the Status of Women, the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2467 on Sexual Violence in Conflict, and the Political Declaration of the High-level Meeting on Universal Health Coverage. We know that those driving the pushback are in the minority, and we can be stronger together. We cannot let conservative voices drive the agenda for women's rights, retreat on sexual and reproductive health and rights, and stand in the way of progress.

Second, governments must hold themselves accountable for change, as well as to promises and commitments already made. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the Commission on Population and Development, the Sustainable Development Goals, and numerous regional, national, and local policies set the goals and the framework – but we're falling short on implementation. Twenty-five years after Beijing, we have tools and resources to measure, track, and hold ourselves accountable for gender equality. We need to leverage these opportunities and turn words into action.

One newer tool to push for action is the Biarritz Partnership – a report developed by the Gender Equality Advisory Council to the French G7. The report makes recommendations to governments on how to advance gender equality through improved legislative frameworks and provides examples of 79 progressive laws from around the world that advance and uphold women's and girls' health and rights.

But we know that laws alone do not guarantee equality and rights for all. Data, particularly disaggregated data, is also critical. When we have gender data, and when gender data is sound, we can see where progress is strong and act to remedy serious barriers that still exist. Equal Measures 2030 is playing an important role in this space,

and their 2019 Sustainable Development Goal Gender Index is a strong accountability tool that measures the state of gender equality in 129 countries, aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals. However, collection of gender data is not common or mainstreamed, and there are many data gaps that inhibit our ability to understand progress toward gender equality. To hold ourselves accountable to policies and programmes that truly serve everyone – regardless of gender identity – we must all commit to collecting, analyzing, and using data that is disaggregated by gender and other key stratifiers, including age, sex, gender identity, indigeneity, caste, ethnicity, geographical location, and income level.

Finally, governments must invest in advocacy and support women-led, women-focused civil society organizations. We are all well-intentioned, but intention does not always translate into action. Advocacy is an accountability mechanism in itself. It raises the voices, needs, and concerns of citizens, shines a spotlight on issues in critical need of attention, and helps push us all where we can and must do better. It is a vital part of democracy, and a gender equal future.

Women groups – be they grassroots groups, national alliances, or global movements – are at the forefront of efforts to drive progress and push back against regressive policies that threaten the planet, peace, and democracy. The Deliver for Good Campaign is an example of a cross-cutting advocacy effort to advance gender equality by applying a gender lens to all 17 Sustainable Development Goals. With more than 500 supporters from around the world, the campaign mobilizes diverse gender-equality advocates around defined and aligned policy asks. But civic space is shrinking, making organizing and mobilizing more restricted and dangerous. It is in this fragile, but critical period now that women-led and women-focused civil society organizations from all levels must be galvanized.

Governments must ensure that civil society organizations have the space and opportunity to convene and organize without fear of punishment. Women's groups must also be meaningfully engaged in policy and decision-making, which is key for policies that are inclusive and representative – as well as for dismantling laws, attitudes, norms, and practices that are holding women back. Governments must also create opportunities for trainings, mentorship, and network building. These opportunities for capacity sharing – as opposed to capacity building – can fuel the power of strong female leaders and gender-equality activists.

Funding is key to taking these steps. To truly leverage the power of women's groups for change and action, leaders must get serious about funding their work and advocacy at the grassroots level, as well as regional and global levels, to build networks, connections, and movements. Right now the math is all wrong. A report from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) highlights that of the \$35 billion in aid from members of the Development Assistance Committee for gender equality, \$10 billion – less than a third – went to civil society organizations, and of that, only 8 per cent (\$800,000,000) went to civil society organizations in the global South. To achieve the gender-equal future we want to see, we must all work together. Women's groups must be recognized, engaged, and resourced as legitimate and strong partners in this fight.

As a global advocate that champions gender equality and the health and rights of women and girls, Women Deliver is committed to continuing to push for a gender-equal world and achieving the promise of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. We firmly believe in the power of partnerships – across governments, civil society, the private sector, academia, and many others – to drive progress. We all have distinct and complementary roles to play to change laws, policies, and norms to advance women's rights and gender equality. On this twenty-fifth anniversary of Beijing, we commit to turning promises into action. We need governments to do the same.