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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.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

A global independent women's body

On the twenty-fifth year of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the world is discussing once again how far away we are from reaching its aims. Lack of monitoring and accountability on the part of governments, as well as growing inequalities and rising anti-rights and anti-gender movements are hampering the progress made on gender equality and women's human rights since 1995. There is an urgent need to re-institutionalize gender accountability, since existing bodies at neither the national nor the international levels are adequately responsive to the violations on women's human rights and LGBTIQ rights, in an urgent and effective manner. To that end, there is an eminent need for an independent women's body that will serve women of the world in all their diversity. This statement aims to provide an introduction to discussing the establishment of a global independent women's appeal body comprised of members of women's organizations. The structure and functions of the body will certainly need further discussion in the short and midterms. With the twenty-fifth year review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the Commission on the Status of Women presents an important platform to further the discussions this idea.

Justification

Anti-feminism and far-right movements are on the rise globally. The risk of increasing inequalities, violence, inhuman and degrading treatment, arbitrary arrested, and detentions or other type of rights violations exist and are increasing in many situations where specifically women are deprived of their rights and liberty. No one or no country is immune to this risk. Women severely confront increasing threats to life, inequalities, and violence. There are setbacks, backlashes, and pushbacks on gender equality in many countries, and, strikingly enough, in multilateral and bilateral international organizations.

There is an urgent need to examine the shrinking democratic spaces and related reflections on civil society, specifically on feminist organizations and women's human rights defenders. Democratic spaces for civil society are under threat. Recent years have been witnessing growing antagonism on the part of governments to women's organizations and their activities. Many States continue to hamper civil society participation in multilateral arenas. They pass restrictive laws and curtail activity. In many parts of the world, restrictions on peaceful assembly and association rights framed civil society organizations as a threat to security and sovereignty.

While such pushbacks are taking place, women activists and women's human rights defenders do not have an independent body to directly appeal to when their rights are violated. There is need for substantial protection frameworks and resources to reduce the obstacles and risks women and women's organizations face due to ongoing violence, instability, online and offline attacks, and structural inequalities.

Therefore, women around the world, women's organizations, and LGBTIQ organizations need a body where they can freely and without any fear make appeals, and also be a part of such a body upholding human rights principles and non-discrimination.

Why do we need a new body?

Although there are some international monitoring appeal bodies on gender equality and human rights, namely the Committee for Elimination of Discrimination against Women, the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and

Domestic Violence on the implementation of the Istanbul Convention, and the Human Rights Committee, it is rather difficult to consider them fully independent. This is because nominations and elections to these bodies are made directly by State parties, as very clearly stated both in the Convention on Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women and Istanbul Convention rules and procedures (See Article 17[1] of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and Rule 9[2] of the Istanbul Convention). Governments nominate candidates and in some cases directly from the political party in power, such as in the very recent case in Turkey with Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, and the selection of candidates is also undertaken by the delegations of the state parties. This process overshadows the independency and impartiality of the experts and the bodies.

In addition, the above bodies offer either limited or no space for the participation of women's organizations during nomination and election processes. Although they offer some space for women's organizations, there are no sanctions on governments that violate the related articles.

Another example of the lack of participation by women's organizations can be witnessed at the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, where governments meet every March in New York to make decisions on global women's rights and gender-equality policies globally. Commission on the Status of Women has severely closed its doors to women's organizations in recent years, specifically at the negotiations that take place for its agreed conclusions.

Strangely enough, while the decisions are on women's rights and empowerment, diplomats and officials discuss and decide on global policies while excluding the views, experiences, and participation of women.

In summary, neither equality structures within countries, nor within international bodies provide space to independent women's organizations or open minimal space, with the exception of a few countries with advanced rights policies. Furthermore, governments increasingly establish their own non-governmental organizations and pretend they work with civil society. This leads to the complete exclusion of independent women's organizations from the scene and from policymaking processes.

In the view of the above, women and women's organizations around the world do not have access to an independent body that they can appeal to and be part of to decide and implement the policies and procedures that effects their own lives. There is an urgent need to re-institutionalize gender accountability.

We need an independent body that will serve women in the world in their all diversity, free of the cumbersome bureaucracy and hierarchy of international policymaking processes, where women can make appeals, place complaints without any barriers (such as language, geography, class, etc.) and get workable solutions, and be protected or freed from violence or degrading treatment. Within this body, women can also have space for devising policies on enhancing women's rights, gender equality, feminist values, and women's empowerment.

It is high time we had an independent body with powers, which will find solutions to women's needs and complaints. Continuous and coordinated efforts will be needed, during the Beijing+25 meetings and beyond, to shape such an independent body that is owned, ruled, and managed by women.

Thoughts to be considered on the structure and functions of the body

This independent structure should have the capacity to receive complaints, prevent, protect, and be the intermediary body for punishment and compensation

processes of those who commit crimes against women and monitor the systems and their accountability structures. It can monitor the implementation of the outcomes of the Beijing+25 meetings and the global forums, but it should not be there to monitor only; its main function will be to respond.

It can be a decentralized structure with a centre or centres that will be managed by women or women's NGOs, in all their diversity, with a horizontal organizational model and horizontal working relations.

It will have to be acknowledged by international organizations and governments, and have the powers to make protocols with existing national and international bodies on gender equality and other pertinent institutions, so that it will have a legitimate stance to act as a social partner in global policymaking and monitoring processes.

It has to be responsive to urgent needs; for example, it must have the capacity to bring solutions towards eliminating the language barriers that are a big hindrance for especially grassroots women.

Sponsorship from independent resources may be sought and mobilized. The sustainability and format of the funding will be important in order to ensure that this body can undertake the important and extensive work that it sets out to achieve.

Further questions still remain, such as what will be needed to ensure the legitimacy and the power of this body towards states and multilateral institutions, and how its structure can be formed to enhance its powers.

Needless to say, the structure, functions, and funding of the independent body will require extensive and comprehensive discussions during and after the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action review processes.

We need a world that is responsive to women's needs and ensures equality and freedom for women. The 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action is a time for galvanizing change!
