



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
23 November 2019

English only

Commission on the Status of Women

Sixty-fourth session

9–20 March 2020

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 European Women’s Lobby, 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.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

The European Women's Lobby, together with its 2000 women's organizations across Europe, calls on governments worldwide to reaffirm their commitment to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women, United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Twenty-five years on, a new generation of feminist activists have joined the global mission for women's human rights and equality between women and men, girls, and boys, bringing about new momentum to tackle systemic and intersectional aspects of gender inequality. The year 2020 marks a critical moment in assessing the visionary agenda of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action a quarter of a century after its adoption. As we celebrate the tenth anniversary of the creation of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), the full implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action must remain a priority for the future. It is also a critical moment to assess Sustainable Development Goal 5: gender equality.

While some progress has been made over the past 25 years, there is still a long way to go for fully achieving women's human rights and equality between women and men and girls and boys. In particular, there are significant gaps in the implementation of the overarching commitments in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action's 12 critical areas of concern. In Europe, progress on women's human rights and equality between women and men has stalled. Women worldwide have witnessed how political responses that focus on austerity measures have disproportionately impacted women, pushing them into low-paid precarious work, coupled with a disproportionate burden of unpaid care work. Austerity and neo-liberalism have pushed equality between women and men even further down the political agenda. We have seen the shocking decimation of funding for women human rights and women's organizations in Europe. This is unacceptable. The European Women's Lobby seeks to ensure that the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Sustainable Development Goals remain at the top of the political agenda, supported by powerful institutional mechanisms and resources.

We call on governments to reaffirm the commitment to affirmative actions and gender mainstreaming, which remain the most powerful transformative tools for ensuring that a gender perspective is an integral part of all policies and actions across the spectrum of every policy area, including in macro-economic policies and gender budgeting.

Today in Europe, we are seeing pivotal changes towards equality between women and men at the structural level and in mind-sets. The results of the European Parliament elections in May 2019 saw an increase of the number of women elected. This represents a positive shift towards parity democracy, notably through women's participation and representation in key political decision-making positions. For the first time, the European Union welcomes its first woman President of the European Commission leading a gender-balanced commission. As leaders of the European Union over the next five years, it is imperative that these decision makers take responsibility for accelerating the pace of change to guarantee women and girls their right to a free, equal, and dignified life.

European Union political leaders need to take action to guarantee women's human rights, equality between women and men. Indeed, despite these positive developments in the European Union leadership, women's human rights and equality between women and men continue to stagnate in the European Union and beyond.

We call for a robust European political strategy on equality between women and men with ambitious goals, targets, benchmarks, and strong inter-institutional mechanisms and resources to support implementation, including annual ministerial meetings to monitor progress. The specific focus of such a strategy should be the elimination of all inequalities between women and men. Women's experiences and life circumstances should be at the heart of this strategy to allow specific actions to improve their lives. The strategy should also be consistent throughout the European Union's internal and external policies, reflecting the continuum of inequalities faced by women within and outside the European Union and in the context of the universal principles of the Sustainable Development Goals and other human rights instruments, notably the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

Despite growing evidence that the patriarchal neo-liberal economic system is unsustainable, the obsession with growth in gross domestic product remains central to our economic policies. The neo-liberal model reinforces gender stereotypes. Women and girls continue to face inequalities within the formal employment sector throughout their life cycle. Gender pay, pension, and poverty gaps remain endemic, and unpaid care and domestic work remains unrecognized in an entrenched outdated male breadwinner model. Stringent austerity measures have disproportionately impacted women – poor women, women from ethnic minorities, women of color, women with disabilities, and older women – who already face multiple forms of discrimination. There can be no business-as-usual. The economy must serve the well-being of all, and not the other way round. Feminist economists are an inspiration for a radical new vision for people and the planet, including the care economy. We call on all European Union Member States to deliver a feminist economic model for the well-being of all, putting the care of ourselves, each other, and the planet at its core.

Violence against women is a human rights violation. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action clearly states that violence against women is a manifestation of the historically unequal power relations between men and women. This imbalance has led to domination over and discrimination against women by men and to the prevention of women's full and advancement. Preventing and ending all forms of violence against women and girls, including sexual exploitation in all its forms, protecting and supporting victims, ending impunity, prosecuting perpetrators, and addressing all the structural dimensions must be a major priority for all governments. It also must include emerging forms, as the digital revolution is witnessing the continuum of violence against women increasingly taking place in the online space. All women and girls must have the right to live a life free from male violence and free from the fear of such violence, including displaced, asylum-seeking, and undocumented women and girls. We call on all European Union Member States to reiterate their commitment to ending all forms of violence against women and girls. In addition, we call on the European Union to ratify the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence and the Istanbul Convention, and to establish and implement a comprehensive framework to combat violence against women, including sexual exploitation and prostitution.

We further call on the United Nations and all governments to reaffirm their commitment to existing agreed language and instruments on women's rights. We condemn the trivialization of prostitution as "work" by some United Nations agencies and reports, which renders invisible the structural damage of the prostitution system and its links with human trafficking. All governments must address the root causes, recognize prostitution as violence against women, end impunity of the commercialization and purchase of women and girls' bodies, and develop exit policies and resources to guarantee women and girls real choices in their lives.

Since the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the world has changed considerably. Emerging issues that have accentuated and arisen in the past 25 years, including conflicts and ensuing displacement of women and girls, and violations of their human rights, must be addressed now and prioritized. Accelerating climate change has become an increasingly urgent issue impacting disproportionately on women. Young women are leading mass movements, demanding urgent action on the climate crisis.

In Europe as in many other parts of the world, we have seen growing anti-feminist populism, which promotes patriarchal traditional values, directly threatens women's human rights, pushes back on women's sexual and reproductive health and rights. The shrinking space of civil society is silencing women's collective voices and withdrawing funding for women's organizations. A vibrant, independent, critical, civil society feminist movement is vital for democracy and fundamental to achieving women's human rights.

The European Union and its Member States are at a political turning point: we demand action now to complete the unfinished business in turning the visionary Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action of 25 years ago into tangible and effective actions to guarantee women's and girls' human rights and an equal future. Investing in women's rights is the core commitment for a more sustainable, democratic, and inclusive world.
