



# Economic and Social Council

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## Commission on the Status of Women

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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 Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women (ARROW), 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 Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women (ARROW) is a regional non-profit women's and young people's organisation established in 1993 with a consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council, UN Framework Convention on Climate Change observer accreditation, and commitment maker of the Generation Equality Forum. ARROW has participated in the Beijing Platform for Action processes since its inception at the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995. On the eve of the thirtieth anniversary of what was hailed as a "landmark text" in the realisation of gender parity, the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2024 states that we are 134 years away from reaching gender parity and approximately five generations beyond the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) targets.

The Generation Equality Forum launched a Global Acceleration Plan in 2021 to accelerate investment and implementation on gender equality. However, the Generation Equality Forum Accountability Report 2024 shows that the Asia-Pacific region's implementation of Gender Equality Forum commitments is 41% or less, demonstrating failure in upholding commitments. This results in a loss of productivity of USD 17 trillion annually, exacerbated by climate crises, unequal burden of care work, gendered digital divide, and political will fueled by authoritarianism, fundamentalism, and conservatism.

### **Climate Change an Impediment to Realising Gender Equality**

In the latest regional human development report launched by UNDP in November of 2023, climate change is deemed as an "existential threat for our region." Asia-Pacific countries experienced, on average, six natural disasters a year over the past three decades. In 2022 alone, extreme weather events are linked to over 7,500 deaths, affecting over 64 million people, and causing economic damage estimated at USD 57 billion. Countries with higher poverty rates are also the ones most susceptible to disasters. The impact of climate change is disproportionately felt by marginalised populations, particularly women, girls, and non-binary people, whose Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights are often overlooked in climate policy. In contexts where infrastructures disintegrate during disasters, accessing sexual and reproductive health services becomes nearly impossible for many, leading to the risks of maternal mortality and early pregnancies, especially for girls forced into early marriage. ARROW's COP28 Regional Advocacy Brief published in 2023 reported that women, girls and gender diverse people face gender specific health adversities due to the impact of climate change. ARROW's studies with Bangladesh, Nepal, and the Philippines revealed that climate disasters have heightened the incidence of child marriage, sexual and gender-based violence, and restricted access to sexual and reproductive health services, especially for those in rural and vulnerable settings. Climate crisis also contributes to the triple burden of reproductive, productive and community work for women and gender diverse people, increasing their responsibilities of unpaid domestic and carework and time poverty (ARROW For Change, Climate Justice in Planet A, 2022).

### **Re-calibrating Reproductive Justice in Asia and Pacific**

The 2023 Gender Social Norms Index, shows that gender equality is being constrained by social norms. The ARROW for Change on Reproductive Justice published in 2023 shows that these deep-rooted inequalities exacerbated by structural and systemic barriers severely limited the autonomy and decision-making of women, resulting in social disparities and restricted access to Sexual and Reproductive Health. Factors such as caste, education, status, age, marital status, sexual orientation, gender

identity and more continue to impede the achievement of the highest possible standards of sexual and reproductive health. Historical and current dynamics, including the underrepresentation of women and girls in decision-making processes, further marginalised them socially, culturally, and economically. Women and girls are frequently assigned to reproductive and care work due to societal expectations of ‘natural’ caregiving instincts, with little to no recognition or compensation. This perpetuates the gendered division of labour in the Asia-Pacific region. (ARROW For Change, Reproductive Justice: Recalibrating the SRHR Agenda, 2023)

### **Our Continuous Call for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights for ALL Women in Asia- Pacific**

In our most recent “call to action” produced at the Asia- Pacific regional convening ahead of the Summit of the Future, we stated that social and cultural norms in the region also continue to restrict the economic and civic participation of women and young people in their diversity, limiting their opportunities for equitable empowerment. Ahead of the Seventh Asia and Pacific Population Conference (2023), ARROW and partners published a “call to action” for duty bearers where it was asserted that unsafe abortions, limited contraceptive access and range of choices, adolescent and teenage pregnancies, sexual and gender-based violence, and child marriage are notably high in the Asia-Pacific region. Comprehensive Sexuality Education is widely neglected in both formal and informal sectors. Even where commitments are made, implementation is hindered with outdated curricula, fragmented delivery methods, insufficient resources and inaccessibility for marginalised groups. Recent changes in laws with regards to early marriage age and adolescent sexuality have also posed challenges to adolescent access to sexual and reproductive health, which manacle sexuality within the marital, heteronormative framework. This has resulted in increased parental and family control over adolescent sexuality and strengthened regressive social norms. Sexual and gender-based violence among women and young people in the Asia-Pacific region still remains high. Female genital cutting/mutilation (FGM/C) is practiced in several Asian countries across the continent.

Older women, who constitute a growing portion of the population, also face significant challenges related to health, income security, and long-term care as demographic shifts reshape the region’s social structure. These demographic shifts have implications for health, employment, social protection, income security, quality of life, lifelong learning and long-term care of individuals including humanitarian and disaster response. In the region, women with disabilities also face intersecting discrimination that limits their legal capacity, autonomy, and access to reproductive health services. The persistence of outdated laws and biased medical assessments often lead women with disabilities to forced abortions, sterilisations, and involuntary treatments. (ARROW for Change, Disability Rights and SRHR: An Intersectional Approach to Ending VAW, 2022) The intersection of multiple inequalities, including gender disparities have been deeply institutionalised in the digital sphere as well. Significant digital divides persist, less than 60% of women in the Asia-Pacific region have digital access, women and girls have less internet access, less mobile phone ownership compared to men. (Measuring Digital Developments, ITU, 2023) The conversations around digital rights and security have changed since 1995 as they intersect with every other human right today. While online platforms have been essential to feminist movements, they have also created new challenges for gender justice, including technology facilitated gender based violence, discrimination against women and girls and limitations to bodily autonomy based on algorithm decision making, breaching of privacy and data security, authoritative government regulations to limit gender expressions and unequal, non-regulated and inaccessible opportunities for emerging technologies.

### **Our Continued Recommendations**

We recommend the Member States to take following actions in order to accelerate the implementation of Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action:

- Further commit to and fast track actions on the past commitments in accelerating the implementation of Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action to ensure gender equality through resourcing, inclusive policy making and programming and upholding human rights at all times including during the times of climate and conflict crises and humanitarian settings
- Commit to a climate justice framework, ensuring that climate-related policies should be informed by the lived experiences of women and girls in their diversity. Adopt a human rights-based, intergenerational and gender-sensitive approach that includes sexual and reproductive health and rights, supported by robust financing and policy reforms. Ensure that the climate dedicated resources through domestic and vertical funds have a gender centred and social justice approach and are all accessible to women and girls in the grassroots.
- Promote the leadership, meaningful participation and voices of women and young people in all their diversities in decision-making including planning, implementation and monitoring processes including in the Commission on the Status of Women negotiations and processes.
- Strengthen health systems ensuring universal access to quality sexual and reproductive health and rights services, information and education using an adolescent, youth-centric, and disability- friendly approach.
- Prioritise budget availability for, integration and implementation of comprehensive sexuality education that is accessible to all young people in their diversity in national education systems.
- Recognise reproductive economy by recognising, factoring and redistributing unpaid and domestic care work.
- Introduce inclusive digital policies to bridge the digital divide that has severely impacted communities and also be cognizant of the disparate gendered-use of technology, threat to privacy and cyber security, and the risk of backlash.

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