



# Economic and Social Council

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## Commission on the Status of Women

Sixty-ninth session

10–21 March 2025

**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 Sveriges Kvinnolobby, 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

Thirty years have gone by since 189 states gathered in Beijing for the Fourth World Conference on Women and unanimously adopted the Beijing Platform Action (BPfA). The anniversary takes place at a time when development towards substantive gender equality in many aspects and in many countries is going backwards. The Swedish Women's movement urge UN Women to increase its efforts to defend women's sex-based rights in all areas against all threats and to align all its work with agreed language that more than ever needs to be upheld.

Years of economic crises have widened the income gap between women and men and poverty is as feminized now as it was in 1995. Women and girls are affected in other and often worse ways than men by climate change, war and conflict. Women are beaten, raped, exploited and murdered because of their sex in war and in peace, in public and in private spheres, offline and online in all countries.

In Sweden the pay gap between women and men seems to be growing again after many years of slow decline. Violence against women, especially against girls and young women and particularly online, is growing. Women are on sick leave twice as often as men and the life expectancy of working-class women is falling.

Around the world women and our movement are facing a multifaceted backlash. Far-right, conservative and religious fundamentalist regimes and organizations want to roll back our rights and freedoms. In Afghanistan, the Taliban regime has erased previous progress. Women cannot leave their homes without a male companion and girls are not allowed to go to school. In the United States, parts of South America and several European states the right to abortion and reproductive freedom is violated. But the threat also comes from neoliberal agendas and postmodern theories that claim that our reproductive rights can be bought and sold in the prostitution and surrogacy industries. They also defend harmful practices such as child, early and forced marriage as a traditional, cultural and religious practices and deliberately conflate the concepts of sex and gender, which inevitably erodes women's sex-based rights.

### **The backlash takes place within the UN system**

This part of the backlash has made a mark inside the UN system including within UN Women. Agreed conclusions from CSW, reports from a range of UN bodies and expert groups nowadays often divert from agreed language and women's human rights as they are defined in CEDAW and BPfA. UN entities like UNAIDS and UNFPA actively work to decriminalize the sex trade, despite that CEDAW (article 6) and several other human rights instruments obliges states to take all necessary measures to suppress the exploitation of women in prostitution. Earlier this year UNFPA launched a new report about sexual and reproductive rights in the private sector in which they describe how employers can support employees to build families through surrogacy arrangements, even though surrogacy is a form of trafficking and violence and breaches several human rights conventions (Advancing Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights in the Private Sector: The case for action and accountability in the workplace, 2024). At the same time UN Women and other UN agencies far too often fail to consider new and emerging issues. Digitally facilitated violence, including pornography, was hardly mentioned in the agreed conclusions from CSW 67, when the priority theme covered innovation and technological change, and is completely absent in the recently adopted Global Digital Compact.

The Generation Equality initiative that was launched by UN Women in 2021 was supposed to celebrate and push for the full realization of BPfA but texts that have been produced barely relate to the previous commitments that the states have made. The Global Acceleration Plan does not mention prostitution, pornography or

surrogacy and consistently focuses on different identities rather than the sex-specific realities of women and girls today. Time and time again maternity protection and the link between discrimination and women's reproductive rights that is a matter of recurrent concern in CEDAW is more often hidden than referred to in the current work of UN Women.

The Swedish Women's Lobby calls upon CSW and thus UN Women to use its mandate to promote women's rights, address urgent problems and develop proposals. We urge UN Women to

- Stand up against all threats to women's rights and to actively and constructively work to break deadlocks between states, regions and other actors that hinder progress in international negotiations and work for gender equality. CSW is an opportunity to reject extremism wherever it comes from.
- Fiercely defend and work for the realization of women's sex-based rights as they are defined in CEDAW and to align all its work with agreed language. It should not be possible for UN Women to produce materials that contradict or erode any articles of CEDAW.
- Support, defend and promote a holistic understanding of sexual and reproductive rights that encompass freedom from violence, harmful practices and all forms of commodification, including prostitution, pornography and surrogacy.
- Use CSW69 as the prime opportunity to revitalize CSW and restore the legitimacy of one of the biggest and most important commissions of the UN. New concrete goals for the next steps forward should be adopted and then followed up on, which has been done before in the BPfA+5 evaluation process, but not in the more recent anniversaries of the platform.
- Increase its cooperation with and protection of the women's movement. Women's organisations should be meaningfully engaged in formulating and adopting agreements at CSW and in all other processes. Our voice should be given priority over influential corporations and private foundations.
- Develop and strengthen broad policy implications of CSW. CSW must embrace the concrete articles of CEDAW and use them as a starting point for broad agreements and alliances on women's rights and gender equality. The narrow one-topic method used for so many years should come to an end. Only addressing one priority theme has proven to be a contradiction to the holistic spirit of CEDAW and BPfA.
- Suggest and implement rules that puts more pressure on states to deliver on CEDAW and BPfA as well as recent commitments made at CSW. States such as Afghanistan and Iran which not only reserves itself against but also violate the portal clauses of CEDAW and sabotage the negotiations at CSW should be excluded from the membership of the commission. Overall CSW should put more emphasis on monitoring and following up commitments made at previous commissions.