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## Commission on the Status of Women

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entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and  
peace for the twenty-first century”

**Statement submitted by Asia Pacific Transgender Network, Best Practices Policy Project, Inc., Federatie van Nederlandse Verenigingen tot Integratie Van Homoseksualiteit – COC Nederland, GIN SSOGIE NPC, ILGA World, International Service for Human Rights, OutRight Action International, Southeast Asia Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression Caucus (ASC), Inc., Stichting CHOICE for Youth and Sexuality, Swedish Federation of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Rights – RFSL, and Rainbow Railroad, non-governmental organizations 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

In 1995, feminist human rights defenders and activists, including lesbian, bisexual, trans and intersex (LBTI) women and gender diverse persons, sex workers, youth, human rights defenders and persons with disabilities gathered to demand an equal and just future. They fought for recognition and inclusion in the struggle for gender equality, leaving a lasting mark on the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. These documents are groundbreaking, the result of countless hours of strategizing, negotiating, and a refusal to be silenced.

Though the world has changed dramatically, many of the challenges faced by LBTI individuals and human rights defenders persist, even within feminist and women's rights political spaces. LBTI people who are sex workers, persons with disabilities, youth, migrants, refugees, Black, Indigenous people, people of color, living on unceded and occupied land, in conflict and conditions of war, living in rural and maritime areas, targeted by agribusiness and land grabs, and facing the first impacts of climate breakdown, are systematically excluded.

On this thirtieth anniversary, the Beijing promise remains unfulfilled for LBTI women and gender diverse persons, especially those from further marginalized groups. State and non-State actors continue to actively work towards rolling back gender equality. LBTI persons, and those who defend their rights, face multiple intersecting forms of discrimination and violence, including; stigma, inequality, lack of access to justice and social services, exacerbated gender-based violence, corrective rape, harmful social and cultural norms, gender roles, and stereotypes, and criminalization of their identities and livelihoods, particularly for sex workers and trans women. Laws related to vagrancy, national security, and public morality are used to target them. In many countries, same-sex marriage and adoption are prohibited. The increased criminalization of advocating for the rights of LBTI persons poses a threat to all of civil society and human rights defenders. Furthermore, the fundamental right to bodily autonomy is frequently violated, with intersex persons subjected to non-consensual surgeries and gender-affirming care being outlawed or restricted.

The reality of legal exclusion is undeniable compounded by war and occupation, which disproportionately affect LBTI persons. The issue of “pinkwashing” also arises, where LBTI rights narratives are co-opted to justify wars or occupation under the guise of liberation and protection, while ignoring or exacerbating human rights abuses.

Religious fundamentalism often hinders gender equality and the decriminalization of LBTI individuals, with colonial-era legal frameworks and conservative networks spreading misinformation. However, LBTI theologians and religious leaders are reclaiming sacred texts to promote inclusivity, dignity, and the rights of LBTI people, playing a crucial role in challenging criminalization.

For many LBTI persons in colonized Indigenous and faith-based contexts, coloniality, environmental degradation, and spirituality are deeply interconnected. Spirituality becomes resistance, fostering connections with the land, ancestors, and communal identity while confronting the violences of climate injustice and heteropatriarchal norms. In contrast, colonial spirituality has historically served as a tool of oppression, reinforcing systems of exploitation and control. For Indigenous peoples, whose worldviews are rooted in deep relationships with their environment, spirituality-based advocacy provides a means of survival and a framework to challenge the exploitative practices of state and corporate actors.

This vision of justice integrates gender, environmental, cultural, and spiritual dimensions, affirming the sacredness of the land and the diversity of their people.

Oppression faced is multifaceted and interconnects; this means that LGBTI individuals who are also part of other marginalized groups – such as youth, Black people, people of color, Indigenous people, people with disabilities, people from climate frontline communities, sex workers, domestic workers, migrants and refugees and those from the Global South – face compounded challenges, often overlooked in mainstream discourse. The Commission on the Status of Women and other multilateral mechanisms have consistently failed to address these multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination adequately. Too often, issues are sidelined or treated as outside the purview of the Commission, contributing to the marginalization of these groups and eroding existing gains towards gender equality.

Key decisions and debates shaping human rights often take place in the Global North, in cities like Geneva and New York, excluding most human rights defenders of the Global Majority, limiting their participation in shaping global policies that impact their lives. The concentration of discussions in confined spaces raises questions about global power dynamics, coloniality, and representation in policy-making. Additionally, restrictions on civil society participation at the UN make it harder for human rights defenders, including LGBTI activists, to engage in these spaces.

LBT women and gender diverse people with disabilities face compounded challenges, often excluded from both gender justice and disability rights frameworks. They are disproportionately affected by issues including access to health care, social services, and legal protection while experiencing heightened vulnerability to gender-based violence. They face state desexualisation and denial of their legal capacity, which massively impacts their sexual rights and bodily autonomy across many countries and contexts.

LGBTI women and gender diverse migrants and refugees face unique intersecting challenges in access to fundamental rights and safety. They are more likely to experience physical, mental, and sexual violence and discrimination from immigration services, peers, and host communities. For LGBTI refugees in particular, the intense trauma experienced before, during and after transit and resettlement lasts a lifetime. They are more likely to experience homelessness, poverty, long term psychological issues, including depression and suicidal ideation, substance abuse, sexual exploitation, economic and social instability, and isolation. Any attempt to alleviate the systemic barriers and struggles of LGBTI migrants and refugees must also consider the root causes of their displacement and reasons for migration.

We call for a progressive approach to gender equality and human rights. States and civil society actors alike must raise the bar to achieve gender equality. LGBTI women and gender diverse persons must be given real power in shaping policies and strategies.

We call for:

- Comprehensive decriminalization of the lives and livelihoods of LGBTI persons everywhere.
- Robust and transparent mechanisms to hold states accountable to their commitments to gender equality and rights of all women and girls, including LGBTI women and gender-diverse persons, including sex workers, developed in collaboration with these communities. This includes regular, transparent reporting on progress and allocating dedicated national resources for LGBTI-led initiatives.

- Meaningful participation of LGBTI women and gender-diverse individuals in developing and implementing national policies, supported by adequate financing, to achieve holistic inclusion and a gender-responsive framework across education, employment, housing, and healthcare.
- Inclusive data collection, with the development of LGBTI-inclusive data collection guidelines across UN agencies and encouraging member states to adopt these practices to ensure that evidence-based policies making. This will help address the current lack of comprehensive data on LGBTI individuals and families. At the same time, we call for increased legitimacy to be given to community-cultivated data and research.
- The establishment of LGBTI Delegates, especially from marginalized communities, including sex workers, persons with disabilities, youth, migrants, refugees, Black, Indigenous people, people of color, people living under occupation, in conflict and conditions of war, in rural and maritime areas. Moving away from tokenism to ensure that our voices are integrated into negotiations and decision-making processes to ensure that LGBTI priorities are reflected.

The legacy of the Beijing declaration and Platform of Action is a living mandate for change and the achievement of gender equality. As we build on the legacy of the courageous activists who paved the way in 1995, we invite member states to reflect on their contribution toward a gender-equal world. How will future generations view the actions taken today? The time for incremental change has passed. We need bold, transformative action that challenges the very foundations on which we stand.

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