



# 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 Oxfam International, 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

Oxfam believes that achieving gender justice is essential in realizing a just and sustainable world without poverty. Today, almost eighty years since the establishment of the United Nations, three decades since the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) and twenty-five years since the adoption of the Resolution 1325 on women peace and security, it is clearer than ever that the achievement of gender justice is a prerequisite to ending poverty and inequality through sustainable development.

While some progress on the BPfA commitments has been made since 1995, huge challenges remain. Governments have failed to honour the social contract of its implementation: gender-based violence (GBV) in all its forms continues, particularly in armed conflict, post-conflict situations and humanitarian emergencies contexts, and poses a major political and economic challenge. Women are still poorly represented in decision-making, for most girls, secondary education is out of reach, women continue to shoulder unequal and heavy care responsibilities, and in most parts of the world, women can neither own property nor have access to sexual and reproductive health services.

Moreover, with just five years remaining before the 2030 deadline for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), not a single indicator under Goal 5 on gender equality has been fully achieved.

The Gender Snapshot 2024 reveals that though some progress has been made worldwide on gender equality none of the indicators and sub-indicators of SDG Goal 5 are being met. It will still take a staggering 137 years to lift all women and girls out of poverty. Oxfam projects that over 20 million girls are at risk of never returning to school, and that women and girls have faced a significant increase in unpaid care work, which was estimated at 12.5bn hours each day even prior to the pandemic (Oxfam, 2022).

Oxfam laments the slow pace of progress on the implementation of the Platform, and we believe bold and transformative action is now required to meet the BPfA commitments and urge Member States to centre accountability and implementation on these vital thematic issues.

### **Rebuild an Equitable Social Organisation of Care for Gender Equality**

The recognition and redistribution of care, both unpaid and precariously paid, is a key thematic agenda identified by the BPfA. The Platform calls for greater co-responsibility in the sharing of care at the societal level, including the reclamation of the role of the state in care through the provision of critical infrastructure and public services. This agenda connects with many SDGs. Despite this emphasis, women and girls continue to bear two-thirds of the total care work globally (Oxfam 2020) with little recognition of it as ‘productive’ work. Oxfam’s research shows that if we were to count unpaid care and domestic work globally by women aged above 15 years, then it would amount to \$10.9 trillion annually, an amount thrice the size of the world’s tech industry (Oxfam 2020). However, the Pact of the Future Document is disappointing in the cursory reference it makes to Care.

Feminists around the world and Oxfam strongly posit that ‘care’ is central to human and planetary life and crucial for sustenance, but going beyond this recognition, it must be the feminist alternative around which the world needs to be organised as against monetary metrics such as the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). A care-centered society will also ensure that priorities are right for gender equality,

establishment of SRHR and services, elimination of GBV and other forms of gender discrimination.

### **Recommendations**

1. Acknowledging that care is a public good and a human right which is crucial to achieve gender equality and women's rights, rebuild an equitable social organisation of care with policy measure to:

- Recognise the social and economic value of care, and the disproportionate care workload borne by women, especially poor, racialised and Indigenous women.
- Reduce and redistribute care work within households and with the state by challenging gender stereotyping social norms and investing in quality, universally accessible gender-responsive public services and infrastructure.
- Reward and remunerate care work and care workers with professional work, living wages and elimination of the gender pay gap.
- Represent care workers in key decision-making platforms, and uphold care workers' rights including for collective bargaining, decent and safe working conditions, and comprehensive social protection.

2. Reclaim the public nature of care services and restore the primary duty and responsibility of the state to provide such services, and to develop care systems that transform gender relations. Counter conservative and pro-austerity policies which cut down public services.

### **Sexual and Reproductive Health, Rights, and Justice (SRHRJ)**

All individuals have a right to make decisions governing their bodies and access information and services that support their sexual and reproductive health, rights and justice. However, this is far from reality, as 800 women die every day giving birth, a quarter of women cannot say no to sex with their partner and nearly one in 10 women cannot make their own decisions about contraception (UNFPA, 2024).

This is worrying, as compounding inequalities have heightened- racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination continue to obstruct the gains in sexual and reproductive health for women, girls and people of diverse sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC). About 40% of women of reproductive age live in places where access to abortion is legally restricted; and only four countries have rolled back the legality of abortion (Centre for Reproductive Rights, 2023). Multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and exclusion mean that young people, people living with disabilities, Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC), people living in poverty and rural areas, and persons of diverse SOGIESC disproportionately experience SRHRJ violations.

#### **States must:**

- Ensure universal access to a range of comprehensive SRH services, including voluntary family planning and contraceptive methods (emergency contraceptive), safe abortion and post-abortion care, free of parental/spousal consent requirements and that these services are free from judgement, discrimination, coercion, exploitation, and violence. The review should explicitly call for the inclusion of the Minimum Initial Service Package on SRHRJ in emergency contexts.
- Decriminalize abortion, abolish all legal and administrative barriers to accessing safe, comprehensive, free and high-quality options and procedures for

pregnancy termination, in compliance with international human rights commitments.

- Reform or repeal laws that criminalize consensual sex between adolescents and those that criminalize consensual sex between adults; explicitly incorporate the human rights of people of diverse SOGIESC, unlike the Platform which fell short of recognizing their rights.

### **Gender Based Violence**

Globally, gender inequality remains a significant challenge even after the adoption of the BPFA. At micro- and macro- levels GBV continues, and transcends cultures, borders, and contexts, keeping women, girls, people of diverse SOGIESC from pursuing and realizing their full potential socially, economically, and politically.

GBV is unequally distributed, with rates of gender violence significantly higher in low to middle income countries of the Global South than Global North due to lack of and/ or unprogressively health facilities. For instance, Latin America is home to 42 of the world's most dangerous cities to live, and most countries with the highest rates of femicide (Oxfam, 2021), while the Pacific has some of the highest GBV rates in the world. In Vanuatu, 60% of women are reported to have experienced physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner; in Solomon Islands and Fiji, the rate is 64% and, in Kiribati, 68% (Oxfam, 2019).

### **Recommendations**

- Challenge the trend to prioritise economies driven by war and conflict at the expense of vital social, ecological, climate, health, gender, food, and security issues.
- Make sustainable multi-year allocations and flexible funding available to feminist movements and organizations working to end GBV and support survivors.
- Provide free and affordable comprehensive services to prevent and address GBV, including ones that lead to attitude change and prevention.

### **Women Peace and Security**

We are confronted with a sobering moment for the WPS agenda – with record levels of armed conflict; militarisation and increase in military spending; funding cuts for WPS; multi-pronged assaults on feminist civil society space, human rights and on international humanitarian law; crises of forced displacement, protection and hunger, while women and other marginalized groups are systematically excluded from decision-making and peacemaking processes. Despite nearly 25 years of ostensible work on the UN Resolution 1325 on women peace and security (WPS), there remains a significant gap between rhetoric and action. In Gaza, 70 percent of verified victims of the Israeli war are women and children (UNHRO, 2024). The WPS agenda's vision of peace and equality has never been more important – or more so under threat.

### **Recommendations**

- Act on the WPS agenda's foundational principles, not only to make conflict safer for women, but to ensure women drive solutions and to end conflict.
- **Increase quality flexible funding to Global South feminist CSOs, going beyond the minimum target of 15% of funds being earmarked for programs that advance gender equality and allocate a minimum of 1 percent of overseas development assistance for women's rights organizations by 2025.**<sup>[1]</sup>

- **Politically support and fully resource the full, equal, meaningful and safe participation, leadership and influence of diverse women and global south feminist civil society at all levels of peace, security and humanitarian decision-making, with the target of 50 percent. Amplify their voices, create spaces for their engagement with the UNSC and international decision-makers and ensure their recommendations are acted upon.**
- **Promote decolonial feminist priorities, ensuring their reflection in WPS resolutions, policy, planning (e.g. NAPs), and programming.**
- **Center women's, girls' and LGBTQIA+ people's rights, in all peace and security processes, ensuring justice and accountability for violations.**
- **Adopt and implement feminist foreign policies**

### **Women's Land Rights**

The Platform for Action has made comprehensive commitments to secure and protect women's land rights under the critical areas of concern such as women and poverty, women and the economy and violence against women. Some progress has been made in securing women's land rights. Many countries have strengthened equality in land and other property through their laws and policies. However, inequality persists due to lack of implementation of these instruments. Land inequality is tied to legacies of colonialism, conquest, and division. In many parts of the world, land is a politically emotive issue; women continue to be marginalized. This has led to increasing inequality and worsened the climate crisis.

### **Recommendations**

- Ensure that women's land rights and livelihoods are protected by fulfilling national and international commitments through implementation.
- Invest in women and their livelihoods, removing barriers that hinder them from achieving their economic goals and being exploited on their land.

### **Digital Rights**

Much has changed in the digital world since 1995. We recognize and support individuals' access to the myriad forms of potentially life- saving information, entrepreneurship, employment, creative self- expression, entertainment, and stress relief access to technology can provide all sectors of society, though we note a significant digital divide along gender lines that must be overcome. Furthermore, these benefits must be balanced in favour of protecting users' rights to privacy, data security, and physical and psychological safety, particularly youth, women and other vulnerable communities in the global south, who may be disproportionately harmed. Digital tools, spaces, and economies also frequently mirror their creators, including their biases.

Oxfam supports the view that increases in online misinformation, disinformation, and dangerous speech correlate to increases in off-line violence; upholding rights in the digital and technology space has real-world implications for human rights offline. This exacerbated risk of online GBV. Any meaningful commitment to the BPfA must include in its scope the gender-differentiated impacts of technology and the digital world.