

Joint response to the CSW63 Agreed Conclusions

Missing the mark: Governments did not do enough to address structural causes of gender inequalities

The 63rd session of the Commission on the Status of Women grappled with the immensely important intersections of social protection, public services, and infrastructure as key to gender equality, the promotion of rights of womxn and girls and their empowerment. It marked a recognition of the importance of social protection not only as an economic safety net but a human right. However, we are disappointed governments did not commit to universal, public provisioning of social protection, services and infrastructure primarily driven forward by the state through participatory forms of policy making.

Governments met against the backdrop of unprecedented injustice and inequality within and between states, and between social groups, experienced most harshly by womxn, trans and non binary people . In the last year alone, the wealth of the world's billionaires increased by \$900bn or by \$2.5bn a day and just 26 people owned the same as the 3.8 billion people who make up the poorest half of humanity. Nearly four decades of intensifying global neoliberal economic order has seen transfer of public wealth to private wealth in almost all countries. As public wealth has decreased, inequality has increased as states are left with little or no resources to fund redistributive policies. The result: massive concentration of wealth of corporations - of the 100 richest economic entities, 69 are corporations.

Our position, firmly grounded in evidence, is that obscene inequality - the stranglehold of corporate power and the diminishing redistributive policies in all countries, the intersecting climate crises, forced migration and displacement, and the rise of right wing attacks on womxn's human rights as well as the rights of LGBTQIANB+ people - are the result of macroeconomic policies of deregulation, trade liberalisation and privatisation of public goods and services. Responsibility also lies in fiscal policy orthodoxy which places constraints on states' abilities to finance social policies integral to their human rights obligations, in particular their obligation to fulfil womxn's rights and advance gender justice. We believe that austerity has a specific and disproportionate impact on womxn, in that austerity measures are kept afloat by the appropriation and exploitation of womxn's underpaid and unpaid labour.

Globally, only 29% of people have access to comprehensive social security. The majority of the 71%, or remaining 5.2 billion people are either not protected or only partially protected.

Despite evidence from economists, civil society and UN experts that public provisioning of universal social protection, services and infrastructure is the most effective, inclusive and equitable, governments have been inconsistent in their commitment. This is a rather telling example of the grip of private sector and push for private financing and public-private partnerships (PPPs). Indeed, state authorities promote PPPs despite clear evidence that they are counter-productive to gender equality and women's rights.

While the Agreed Conclusions mention ILO conventions and the decent work agenda in the preambular paragraphs, this is undermined by the lack of consistent referencing of the decent work agenda throughout the text. We are even more troubled by the AC

adapting, or more precisely co-opting, the language of 'decent work' while emptying it of state commitments to the four pillars of the Decent Work Agenda.

We welcome the recognition of the growing high incidence of informal and non-standard forms of employment where womxn are overrepresented. However, governments failed womxn workers both in the formal and informal sectors by not committing to reverse policies of labour deregulation that are at the root of labour market inequalities, gender segregation of labour, the undervaluation of sectors where womxn are concentrated as well as formal jobs themselves becoming increasingly informal, let alone the scope for formalisation of work within the informal economy. We believe contributory social insurance is important for womxn informal workers as owners of capital who depend on benefit from womxn's labour in the informal economy should also be held increasingly accountable for contributing to informal workers' social security.

While we applaud commitments governments have made to recognise, reduce and redistribute womxn's unpaid and domestic work through a range of policy measures including the extension of social protection measures to unpaid caregivers of all ages, we are dismayed that they failed to commit to universal social protection and public services and infrastructure.

We are disappointed that some states attempted to undermine even the limited progress on migration governance made by the Global Compact on Migration by objecting to its direct reference in the document. Furthermore, some states attempted to disregard their obligations under human rights law to migrants, urging states to commit to only "basic" service provision for migrants. On the other hand, we were encouraged by the inclusion of language recognizing the need to protect the human rights of migrant womxn and girls "regardless of migration status". We welcome the overdue recognition of migrant womxn workers, including in the informal economy and their access to social protection. While language on the portability of social security for migrants was included and is critical, it could have been made stronger with references to social protection floors and cooperation between countries of origin and destination.

Many of the broader wins in the AC are also wins for womxn migrants - the reference to a living wage for womxn working in delivery of public services, for example, and that womxn's access to social protection is often restricted when tied to formal employment is a critical win for the many migrant womxn workers.

We welcome governments' recognition that trafficking is a consequence of the structural factors including poverty, unemployment, lack of socio-economic opportunities, lack of social protection, pervasive gender inequality and violence, discrimination and marginalization. We regret, however, a continued focus on demand - an argument most frequently advanced with the purpose to criminalise the buying and selling of sex, in stark opposition to the collective demands of sex workers' rights movements and their social protection needs. This was even more disappointing as this was a year in which sex workers and supporting organisations attended the CSW in greater numbers than ever before, and for the first time a side event was held in the UN with representation from sex workers from across the globe.

Despite significant gains, we believe governments failed once again to show leadership and courage to make commitments to systemic changes required to deal with the intersecting crises and center gender equality and womxn's economic and social rights. In particular, there is an ongoing lack of political will to acknowledge the macroeconomic

structures and neoliberal policies as the drivers of inequality and injustice in our societies, and to address them responsibly.

In failing to go beyond mere acknowledgement of, gendered impacts of austerity measures on women's human rights, governments have failed in their obligation to uphold principles of progressive realisation and non-retrogression of human rights. Despite mounting evidence of adverse human rights and gendered impacts of austerity and fiscal consolidation policies, it is unconscionable that most governments in the North and the South aren't committing to finding just and sustainable macroeconomic and fiscal policy alternatives and that international financial institutions and creditors continue with the same tired policy advice.

Although the AC has called upon international financial institutions to support Member States in their efforts to enhance social protection systems, public services and infrastructure, it does little to counter their harmful role of loan conditionalities and policy advice. These institutions have been deliberate and instrumental in rolling back social protection, disinvestment in public services as well as curtailing states' power in developing public policy and expanding fiscal space to fund redistributive policies.

More worrying than governments committing little to public funding and public provisioning the multiple explicit references to the private sector. This flies in the face of evidence showing the disastrous and disproportionate impact of privatised services on womxn, girls and young people, and how Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) are proven to be more inefficient, more costly on the public purse, and unaffordable, particularly for womxn. It's not enough for governments to call for the evaluation of the costs and benefits of private sector participation in social protection, public services and infrastructure. The evidence exists. Governments must fulfill their obligations and commit to publicly funded and publicly delivered universal social protection, instead of backing PPPs.

At the CSW63, as in previous years, feminist and women's rights organizations have put forward demands for tax justice and demonstrated the destructive impact of regressive tax policies on womxn's rights and gender equality. Progressive tax policies and a determination to end tax evasion, avoidance and illicit financial flows that drain public resources across the globe are essential to ensure that public funding is available for social protection and public services. We also note with alarm the growing trend of the private sector gaining increasing space and influence in multilateral spaces.

Finally, we are alarmed by the speed at which right wing forces and religious fundamentalists are occupying multilateral spaces and the international human rights system with the intent to erode hard fought gains by womxn's rights, feminist and LGBTQIANB+ activists. Once again, at the 63rd session of the CSW, these anti-rights organisations and coalitions put our rights at risk. As anti-rights peddlers continue to attack sexual and reproductive health and rights, including abortion, and comprehensive sexuality education as well as rights of LGBTQIANB+ people and impose regressive notions of the heteronormative family, feminists have to fight to hold the ground against backlash and further erosion in existing standards. We are deeply disappointed that governments did not uphold the universality of human rights and specifically recognise multiple and intersecting discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, expression and sex characteristics.