**International Women’s Day Statement by United Nations Human Rights Experts\***

**6 March 2020**

***Twenty-five years after the Beijing Fourth World Conference on Women, no country in the world is free from discrimination against women***

Women’s and girls’ activism and autonomous movements have been the driving forces behind the advancement of women’s human rights and gender equality, and remain ever essential.  Women and girls have been at the forefront of movements for change around the world. But 25 years on from the Beijing Platform of Action, responsibility for progress cannot continue to lie solely on the shoulders of women. While women continue to lead the struggle for equality, men are now more than ever called upon to be a part of movements for gender equality and become women´s human rights defenders. Men and boys need to stand with women and girls as allies in the fight for gender equality and demand an end to impunity and accountability for violations of women’s rights and access to justice. Discrimination against women and girls is a human rights violation which must not be tolerated and States must be held accountable for implementing international standards guaranteeing women’s and girls’ human rights and achieving substantive gender equality. Structural causes for inequality and deeply entrenched discriminatory attitudes and practices must be tackled in order to achieve gender equality and a sustainable future for all.

On the occasion of International Women’s Day, we call for immediate actions for ending discrimination again women and girls. The time to act is now. International Women’s Day has been observed for over a century in different parts of the world. Since the United Nations’ proclamation of 8 March as the Day for Women’s Rights and World Peace in 1977, much has been accomplished, by the international community collectively and by countries individually. An important groundbreaking international human rights treaty, the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women, was adopted in 1979, imposing legal obligations on States to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women in all areas of life. The World Conference on Human Rights in 1993 declared for the first time that women’s rights are human rights. The United Nations convened its Fourth World Conference on Women: Action for Equality, Development and Peace in 1995 and adopted a comprehensive plan to advance women’s right to equality – the Beijing Platform for Action. Gender equality is included in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted in 2015, both as a stand-alone goal and mainstreamed throughout all goals. Many constitutional and legal reforms to integrate women’s human rights fully into domestic law have occurred and many countries have eliminated discriminatory laws.

While celebrating achievements and acknowledging contributions by many, including the UN and regional mechanisms on the elimination of discrimination and violence against women[[1]](#footnote-1), we must recognize that progress remains insufficient 25 years after the Beijing Platform of Action and 41 years since the adoption of CEDAW. Today no country in the world is totally free of discriminatory practices, and discriminatory laws still exist in many places, affecting some of the most critical areas of women’s lives such as marriage, divorce, nationality, free movement, the right to inheritance, property, and work. Important achievements including in the field of reproductive rights, are today at stake. Everywhere, to different degrees, women are still discriminated either through acts of State and non-state actors that explicitly or implicitly deny them the exercise of rights or through a State´s failure to adopt and implement national legislations and policies aimed at achieving gender equality and prohibiting gender-based violence against women. Furthermore, in a context where most countries have implemented fiscal consolidation measures, women disproportionally bear the consequences of economic crisis at various levels and assume a disproportionate burden of unpaid care. We should also not forget that women continue to be excluded from peace and reconciliation processes and mechanisms, despite the fact that they constitute one of the groups most affected by armed conflicts.

Discrimination against women and girls manifests in many forms, from women being considered inferior and excluded from cultural, political, economic, financial, social and religious power to women and girls being subjected to harmful practices, stereotypes and stigma, forced into marriages and contemporary forms of slavery, subjected to human trafficking, physical, psychological, sexual and economic and political violence and abuse, deprived of educational and employment opportunities, denied of their sexual and reproductive health rights, objectified in the media, and denigrated in songs, films, and other artistic or cultural productions and traditions. Ageism toward older women is a growing concern in many societies. The failure to address women’s specific needs, including their reproductive and sexual health, by denying them access to dedicated health services also constitutes discrimination. Criminalization of sexual or reproductive conduct and decision-making that predominately affects women is also inherently discriminatory.

Discrimination against women and girls persists and is too often unchallenged or normalized, including in marketing of products and services that perpetuate gender stereotypes and objectifies women’s bodies. In fact, discrimination lies at the heart of every issue faced by women regardless of their identity or status. It operates in all spheres of women’s lives and is by no means accidental; discrimination is indeed political and systemic. It often reflects cultural stereotypes about women which international law requires States to change. The private sector also must do more to ensure systematic changes to patriarchal power structures, social norms, gender stereotypes and hostile environments that are barriers to women’s equal enjoyment of human rights in all spheres. Structural discrimination, which exists in the public and private realms, reflects an underlying power imbalance that is intended to suppress women and relegate them to an inferior status, whether through what may be perceived as an innocuous practice which is in reality a denial of certain rights, to harmful stigma and marginalization to extreme forms of violence and femicide. Gender inequality is the result of any of these forms of discrimination and is often exacerbated by other factors including poverty, conflict, race, age, and most systems of domination. Thus adopting an intersectional approach to gender discrimination is of critical importance in order to understand and adequately respond to the unique forms of discrimination generally experienced by women on account of race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, age, and disability status among others. Gender inequality is inherently unjust and an ill which undermines the well-being of all societies. Migrant women and girls, asylum seekers and refugees are particularly vulnerable to discrimination, exploitation and violence.

Despite the persistent discrimination and increasing backlash, women and girls human rights defenders and activists have not allowed themselves to be intimidated and silenced. They have been engaged in a range of issues, demanding an end to armed conflicts, gun violence, militarism, authoritarianism, fundamentalism and extremism, hunger, corporate abuses, racism, among many others. They fight for environmental and climate justice, the right to water and sanitation, land rights, and the rights of children, youth and the older persons, indigenous peoples, minorities, migrants, persons with disabilities, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and gender diverse persons. Today on this International Women’s Day, we pay tribute to these women and girls and we celebrate their courage and achievements.

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See news release [“The time to act is now” – UN experts urge men and boys to become women’s human rights defenders](https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25672&LangID=E)

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1. See “25 Years in Review of the Beijing Platform of Action, contributions of the Platform of independent expert mechanisms on the elimination of discrimination and violence against Women (EDVAW Platform)”- available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Women/SR/Booklet_BPA.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)