

Women's Major Group

Written statement to UN Human Rights Council's 3rd Intersessional Meeting on Human Rights and the 2030 Agenda (14 January 2021)¹

Submitted by the [Women's Major Group](#)
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“Building Back Better: Integrating Human Rights in Sustainable and Resilient Recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic”

As the Women's Major Group (WMG) we welcome this special intersessional meeting of the United Nations Human Rights Council (HRC). Since the development period of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) WMG have been actively advocating for the implementation, monitoring and review of the Agenda 2030 to be based on the human rights principles and standards established, and for strong linkages to be present between the UN human rights mechanisms and the UN sustainable development processes.

We find ourselves in very difficult times now — the multi-layered inequalities between and within countries and across the gender spectrum have been exposed and exacerbated by the COVID - 19 pandemic. We see this manifest in the climate breakdown, human rights violations, privatization of public services and power concentrated in the hands of the wealthy elite and corporations.

An accountable and democratic multilateral system that upholds and resources human rights is essential to delivering on the SDGs. We must move out of siloed approaches and processes. SDGs are interlinked and indivisible, just as human rights are, and should not be clustered when implemented and reviewed: the rights of women and girls are fundamental and cross-cutting. To achieve the SDGs we need a transparent and participatory policy making process based on human rights: governments must adopt the inclusive, transformative thinking of justice-oriented movements and organizing.

¹ This statement has been compiled from the documents prepared by the WMG members, namely [WMG 2020 High Level Political Forum Position Paper](#), [From the Pandemic to 2030: Feminists Want System Change](#) briefer series and the [statements WMG members prepared and delivered](#), on behalf of WMG, at the 2020 HLPF.

Multilateralism post COVID-19 must radically transform to deliver on the foundational, aspirational intent of the UN as the institutional bedrock for maintaining global peace and security and fulfilment of the human rights of all the peoples of the world.

Even before the COVID-19 crisis, the world was not on track to meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Responses to the COVID-19 pandemic that do not address systemic barriers and inequalities and the human rights of all, will worsen the crisis and threaten the progress that has been made since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda.

Given the central role women and girls are playing in every aspect of the response to the COVID-19 crisis and the cross-cutting nature of gender equality for achieving the 2030 Agenda, all responses must put the realities and the human rights of women and girls at the center. In order to achieve the 2030 Agenda and emerge from this crisis with more resilient, inclusive, and equal societies, WMG recommends the following actions, at a minimum:

- Create, implement, and resource human rights-based, holistic, gender-responsive COVID-19 recovery plans that first and foremost target the most marginalized groups and are designed to eradicate inequalities.
 - Include all necessary measures to address and eliminate the increased gender based violence against women and girls in their diversities
 - Fulfill girls' right to education, at all levels, by ensuring they have the necessary support and access to technology - without increasing the care burden on women and girls - while schools are closed, and providing incentives, including financial support, to return to school once they open.
 - Build, strengthen, and fund public health systems that deliver universal health coverage (UHC), including sexual and reproductive health and rights, that works for all women, girls, and gender non-conforming people, without discrimination, regardless of all backgrounds including age, ability, or documentation.
 - Include conditionalities for environmental and human rights protections into all recovery packages.
- Collect, analyze, and disseminate disaggregated data with respect for privacy and confidentiality. Use this data to monitor and reduce inequalities in all recovery plans and programs.

- Prioritize and actively seek out the participation of feminist, women and youth-led organizations, and human rights advocates in the design, implementation, monitoring, and review of COVID-19 recovery plans. Support these organizations, including with financial resources, to carry out this work.
 - After the crisis has ended, continue to work with these organizations at all levels, and resource them to do this work.

- Build a more just and equitable financial order, rooted in human rights, gender equality, care, and social, economic and environmental justice, in order to enable governments to adequately finance public services and robust social protection systems, and safeguard human rights for all:
 - Cancel all outstanding sovereign debt of low- and middle-income countries.
 - End illicit financial flows and implement progressive tax systems, including by supporting a global tax body.
 - Fulfill all official development assistance commitments.
 - Suspend patents, lift trade rules that impede access to medicines and medical technologies and that limit government actions required to address the crisis.
 - Refrain from implementing austerity measures, especially those related to social programs and public services.
 - End unfair trade agreements that push reducing funding for and privatizing public services and the investor-state dispute settlement that impose corporates' interests, extort public money and erode domestic policy space needed to advance sustainable development and the enjoyment of human rights.
 - Redirect funds in military budgets to social protection and essential public services.

- Support a multilateral response to the COVID-19 crisis, and beyond, based on the principles of human rights, gender equality, accountability, solidarity, and international cooperation:
 - Strengthen and fund the UN and its agencies, such as the World Health Organization, including by providing long-term general operating support.
 - Guarantee sustainable resourcing of the international human rights system, including the treaty bodies, and ensure full, inclusive and accessible participation of civil society in all proceedings.
 - Support and protect civil society organizations and human rights defenders in their rights to information, freedom of assembly and speech,

as well as in their engagements with the UN, its agencies and processes without fear of retaliation, intimidation, or harassment.

- Hold all state and non-state actors accountable for any human rights violations.
- For this the links between the High Level Political Forum (HLPF) and the UN human rights architecture should be solidified.