

Women's Major Group Statement

HLPF Ministerial Dialogue "Preparing the high-level political forum for post 2015: Steering implementation of the development agenda and reviewing progress"

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When the international community began thinking about the post-2015 development agenda, we were asked to think big: about the future we wanted and the type of world we wanted. And we, as the women's major group did.

We began to think about a development agenda that would go beyond meeting people's basic needs (as the MDGs essentially did) to how we could transform structures, institutions, and societies to achieve justice, equality and the realization of human rights for all.

We felt strongly that there would be no development and no progress, unless there was a clear and uncompromising commitment to the full realization of human rights. We demanded that the post-2015 agenda be firmly rooted in human rights obligations, including CEDAW, and build on the commitments from the UN conferences of the 1990s and their follow ups, especially Rio, Vienna, Beijing and Cairo.

We called for goals to be framed in terms of fulfilling human rights obligations: instead of "healthy lives for all" for example, the realization of the right to the highest attainable standard of health. We demanded that the principles of universality and indivisibility of rights, non-retrogression and progressive realization, the minimum obligations of states to ensure equality and address the needs of the most marginalized, underlie the agenda.

We called for accountability mechanisms that would use and build on existing human rights mechanisms, at all level, including the treaty bodies and Human Rights Council's universal periodic review mechanism. We urged that particular attention be paid to extraterritorial obligations, that states and not the private sector be primarily responsible for implementation, and that the private sector be held to account for their violations of human rights and not just through voluntary mechanisms.

We demanded deep and structural changes to existing global systems of power, decision-making and resource sharing and for a progressive policy framework that aimed to fairly redistribute wealth, assets, and power to achieve social, economic and ecological justice. We called for a framework that would tackle intersecting inequalities and multiple forms of discrimination based on gender, age, class, caste, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity and abilities.

And, as women, we called for women's human rights and gender inequalities to be addressed specifically and throughout the post-2015 framework. From the beginning, we called for a gender equality and women's human rights goal that would end all forms of discrimination and gender-based violence, guarantee women's and girls' sexual and reproductive rights, ensure their rights to and control over land, property and productive resources and their economic independence, recognizing women's role in the care economy and ensuring their rights to social protection and the equal distribution of paid and unpaid work, and their rights to participation in leadership and decision-making at all levels.

And many governments, UN agencies, and other stakeholders agreed. The words "transformative" and "visionary" were used extensively by the SG's high level panel, governments and thought leaders in those early heady days when we began discussing the post-2015 development agenda in earnest, and especially when the Open Working Group began its work to develop a set of recommended goals and targets.

Unfortunately, as the Open Working Group's work is coming to an end and as we have seen over the last week at the HLPF, many of those lofty goals have been discarded. But not by women.

Instead about asking how we can achieve the world we want, governments instead are asking how we prioritize and set an agenda that is feasible, realistic and easy to communicate.

Instead of talking about how we must work together, civil society and governments, to achieve it, the role of the major groups and other stakeholders have been marginalized and our participation constrained. We have been kept out of the agenda setting for the HLPF, restricted from accessing documents and attending meetings, especially informals, despite the fact that the GA resolution that established the HLPF was clear about extending the rights that major groups had to participate in the Commission on Sustainable Development.

Instead of ensuring that the HLPF is a body with political strength and a tool for accountability for the post-2015 agenda, it has instead been subsumed by politics around ECOSOC and discussions have focused on avoiding accountability rather than ensuring it.

Instead of working towards achieving human rights and social justice for all, including women, in the intergovernmental negotiations that have taken place here on the HLPF ministerial declaration, in discussions at the OWG, and at the prepcoms for the SIDS conference, we have witnessed that some governments are far too ready to trade away human rights, and particularly their commitments to gender equality, women's human rights and sexual and reproductive rights, for other political gains. This must stop. Women's bodies, lives and rights are not a negotiating chip.

Instead of addressing the very real threats we face as a result of climate change, governments are instead trying to keep climate change out of development negotiations. The evidence is clear. Climate change affects every aspect of sustainable and human rights. For some perhaps not yet, but if not now, it certainly will impact EVERYONE in a few decades. For many states the damage from climate and extreme weather events and disasters is already off the scale. The women's major group expects adaptation, mitigation and L&D concerns to be integrated across all areas of development, in the HLPF, Annual Ministerial Review, report of the open working group, and the post-2015 development agenda.

We, the Women's Major Group, say clearly and strongly this is not good enough. This is not the world we want.

We need to revive the ideals, principles and vision that we had at the beginning of this process.

Moving forward, we need strong accountability mechanisms. We count on the High Level Political Forum being the body we hoped it would be. To do this we require a number of things:

- First, we must preserve the role of the Division on Sustainable Development to coordinate major groups and members of civil society working on sustainable development. We oppose efforts to incorporate that, and the non-governmental liaison service, under the DESA NGO branch. Doing so would undermine the past twenty years of work to build a Major Group structure and processes that are accountable, transparent and inclusive and which have greatly contributed to global debates on sustainable development. And, along those lines, we must preserve and strengthen the Major Group structure, including by ensuring that the HLPF involves major groups and other stakeholders in the way GA resolution 67/290 intended.
- Second, the HLPF must have its own bureau, and its own secretariat, which should be the Division on Sustainable Development, in order to ensure that it is fully equipped to take up its role in overseeing implementation of the post-2015 development agenda. We cannot overstate the importance of a well-resourced secretariat with specialised knowledge to respond to the

many challenges the implementation of the SDGs and sustainable development will pose over the next 20 years.

- Third, the HLPF must not just be a review mechanism. It must be an accountability mechanism. It should be the place where we can discuss and debate the challenges we face in implementing the SDGs and post-2015 development agenda, and where we can agree on meaningful solutions. An essential part of this is a peer review mechanisms at regional level and global levels located in the HLPF with enhanced participation opportunities for civil society. And it should be a place where we also hold accountable and monitor corporations and international financial institutions, in collaboration with other mechanisms, such as the Human Rights Council's initiative to establish an open ended inter-governmental working group towards a legally binding human rights instruments on transnational corporations and other business enterprises.

We urge governments to work hand in hand with us and to be willing to be courageous to make the changes that will make the difference. Only then, will we be able to achieve sustainable development and poverty eradication – while contributing to gender equality, the full realization of women's human rights, and social justice for all.