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Statement submitted by ACT Alliance - Action by Churches Together, Anglican Consultative Council, Association of Presbyterian Women of Aotearoa and New Zealand, Christian Aid, Commission of the Churches on International Affairs of the World Council of Churches, Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society of the Protestant, Episcopal Church in the United States of America, Islamic Relief, Lutheran World Federation, Restored, and The Girls’ Brigade International Council, non-governmental organizations 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.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Faith in Beijing +25, a collective of faith actors pushing back against the push back: Statement to sixty fourth session of the Commission on the Status of Women

As religious actors and networks of faith-based organizations, we are called to work together in the midst of global changes, rising nationalism, and political, cultural, and religious conflict for gender equality and justice. Throughout history, many faith actors have been working for global gender equality and empowerment, human rights-based development, and in times of emergency, humanitarian response.

We will not remain silent when the roll back on gender equality threatens the progress we have already made, and those achievements are yet to be won. Throughout the review process, we will focus on three critical areas where we as faith actors are collectively making a contribution: 1. Recognizing the diversity of families; 2. Ending violence against women and girls; and 3. Justice in law, as outlined in the statement “Faith in Beijing +25, a collective of faith actors advocating together for gender justice”, submitted by ACT Alliance - Action by Churches Together. In this statement, we advocate for the positive role of religious actors in advancing gender justice, lament the fact that human rights are being undermined, and call for greater resources and strategic alliances.

The role of faith actors in advancing gender justice

As faith actors, our scriptures inspire us to stand up for justice and defend human rights. We work to address the needs not only of the body but also the mind and spirit, honoring the fullness of humanity. We acknowledge that religious institutions, customs, and practices have created, reinforced, and been shaped by unjust patriarchal structures and recognize the disservice that has been to humankind throughout history. The role of religious leaders in combating systems of oppression has never been more important.

Religious institutions and networks of faith-based organizations have been working as integral parts of communities to enhance the lives of women and girls through outreach, mentoring, advocacy, and empowerment initiatives. We have built programs, developed theologies, designed curricula, created movements, and implemented strong measures and policies to work towards gender justice within our institutions and communities. For example, Christian Aid in Latin America and the Caribbean are working with feminist theologians to discuss theologies related to land and climate justice and strengthen the role that religious communities can play in resisting backlashes to gender equality.

To support this work, many tools and training modules have been developed, specifically designed to build the capacity of faith actors to advance gender justice. For example, in 2019, the Lutheran World Federation launched the waking the giant initiative, endorsed by the United Nations, for faith actors to contribute effectively to the 2030 United Nations Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Channels of Hope initiative, led by World Vision with Islamic Relief, also mobilizes and builds on the existing competencies of community leaders, especially faith leaders and their congregations, to respond to some of the most difficult issues affecting their communities.

Religion, human rights and the Sustainable Development Goals

We, as religious actors, strongly reaffirm our commitment to the principles of human rights and to the commitments expressed in international human rights law as

codified in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and international human rights treaties. The ecumenical movement, for example, made significant contributions to the articulation of this foundational instrument of modern international human rights law, through the early work of the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs. The conceptualization of justice as equitable fulfillment of rights and responsibilities is also reaffirmed in new institutional policies and declarations, such as the pioneering Islamic Gender Justice Declaration (Islamic Relief, forthcoming) and the ACT Alliance – Action by Churches Together gender policy (2017).

As the Sustainable Development Goals are anchored in international human rights law, we believe that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is critical to ensuring that “no one is left behind”. Many religious actors are fully part of the struggle for human rights that these agendas seek to protect and promote. Our commitment to human rights is not an arbitrary cultural or ideological preference; it is rooted in religious convictions. There can be no justice where God-given human rights are violated or where duty bearers fail to discharge their responsibilities. We recognize and lament the fact that in many parts of the world today the legitimacy of the principles and obligations expressed in international human rights law are being undermined and attacked as never before.

Resourcing intersectional approaches

The twenty-fifth review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action comes at a time when we are facing great challenges: nationalist populism, increased securitization, climate emergency, and forced migration and displacement. Women and girls, and those most marginalized in society, stand at the crossroads of all these trends, which perpetuate gender inequalities.

As faith actors working in communities, we see how forms of repression are interrelated and recognize gender injustice as an intersectional issue; therefore, we are pivotal partners in addressing them. If we are to successfully implement gender just policies and programs, intersectional approaches to development and struggles for gender justice around the world must be sufficiently resourced. Capacity is important to the sustainability of projects. Increased resources to better enable religious actors and faith-based organizations to develop their own capacity and to work effectively with the growing global partnership for Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development is critical for achieving gender equality.

Making strategic alliances

Strategic alliances with religious actors and networks of faith-based organizations are vital to counter the push back successfully. Religious actors based within their communities have a strong understanding of the local challenges and are well-positioned to develop holistic solutions to the barriers faced. Faith-based organizations and religious actors also have vast reach, with 84 per cent of the world’s population identifying as a member of a religious group, and often existing in communities where even governments have difficulty in ensuring an institutional presence. For example, Side by Side is a faith movement for gender justice that brings together religious and traditional leaders to strengthen strategic partnerships for gender justice in national, regional, and international spaces.

We, as religious actors and faith-based networks, are committed to ensuring that gender justice and equality becomes a reality around the world. The roadmap to the twenty fifth anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action creates a space for movements promoting gender equality to strengthen joint work, engage in dialogue, and collaborate on shared endeavours. It is vital that all of civil society stand together in our joint vision for a gender just world. As such, strengthening

partnerships between secular organizations, government institutions, and faith-based networks is critical in order to push back against the push back.

Turning hope into action: recommendations

Although 143 out of 195 countries have guaranteed gender equality in their constitutions, discrimination against women persists in laws and policies, gender-based stereotypes, and social norms and practices. Based on our experience, knowledge, and expertise as religious actors and faith-based networks, we urge Member States to:

- Take urgent and accelerated action to fully implement the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and all other existing agreements and commitments for gender equality and the protection of women's rights, with no regression or exception.
- Develop and resource national implementation plans, which promote global equity, to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and the interconnected gendered targets.
- Recognize and address the interconnections, interrelatedness, and interdependence among climate and human rights, gender equality, and the Sustainable Development Goals, and support a holistic development agenda that puts human rights front and centre.
- Support robust adherence to the international human rights law system to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.
- Resource intersectional approaches to development that recognize the diversity of life and protects and advances women's and girls' equal rights to: safety; a healthy environment; economic advancement; freedom from exploitation, violence and discrimination; education and health; and includes the voices and traditional knowledge of indigenous women.
- Work in partnership with faith communities to form strategic alliances between secular, governmental, and religious institutions.
- Use a holistic human rights approach to tackle the challenges faced by women and girls, with an acknowledgement of the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination that women can experience.
- Mobilize the necessary resources, financial and other, for the implementation of programs and projects that promote a justice-oriented approach to development.
- Recognize in government policies and implementation that faith actors are key stakeholders in this work, which requires adequate resourcing to ensure that we leave no one behind.
- Make themselves and all other stakeholders, including faith actors, accountable for commitments to all human rights.