



REPORT
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WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION AND PARTICIPATION IN GLOBAL DECISION-MAKING

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A GENDER
EQUAL MULTILATERAL SYSTEM

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MESSAGE TO READERS

GWL Voices, a gender and multilateralism advocacy group composed of sixty two global women leaders, presents an unprecedented report on the state of leadership at multilateral institutions. The report shows that by consistently excluding women from top leadership positions, these institutions no longer reflect the societies they serve.

Our advocacy pushes for the integration of women's voices in all spheres of society, particularly in peace and security, global governance, human rights, gender issues, international peace and security, environmental diplomacy, global health, and sustainable development.

Hence, as a collective voice of women's leadership, backed by the support of our partners, this report reflects our stance on an issue whose time is long overdue.

In the wake of unending global challenges, women's representation and participation will result in transformational leadership we all can trust - one the world desperately needs.

We want to thank our partners, GGIN, C4UN, Bahá'í International, and the International Alliance of Women, whose foresight and support have enabled us to carry out this critical work.


Here's to elevating our voices for change and inclusion while advancing the issues we care about most.



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Diversity in representation and participation is a critical first step to better informed and more nuanced policymaking. It is a catalyst for increasing the range of lived experience that is drawn upon during decisionmaking, which is fundamental to a well-oiled democracy. Inviting a multiplicity of people into decisionmaking spaces means the views and needs of people who are impacted by any given policy are more fairly represented. Without women's leadership and participation in multilateral spaces, gender equality is not a possibility.

Multilateral spaces have historically been the realm of men, and the United Nations (UN) is no exception. Though established in 1945, even today we are still seeing significant 'firsts' involving women's representation and participation. Just this year, Ruchira Kamboj became India's first female permanent representative to the UN, and Costa Rica appointed Maritza Chan Valverde as their first female Ambassador of Costa Rica to the UN.

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It is important not to assume, however, that women are inherently more peaceful or that women's involvement in policymaking will automatically result in substantive changes for women's and minority rights. Systems of oppression like patriarchy, capitalism, and white supremacy shape societal norms and hierarchies in such a way that often, those in leadership positions must adhere to them in order to be taken seriously as decisionmakers. Increasing women in global decisionmaking, then, is only a first step in ensuring a more equal world. Such an effort requires a simultaneous engagement with systemic and institutional reform if inclusion is to be more than an 'add and stir' scenario.

The UN has historically played a large part in establishing women's representation as a global norm. The Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995 created the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which laid out the most comprehensive agenda at the time on gender equality. It was the first global policy framework to include a specific focus on girls' rights; to

reaffirm that women's rights are human rights; and to confirm gender mainstreaming as a key strategy for achieving gender equality. These firsts paved the way for future UN commitments to women's rights and representation. UN Security Council Resolution 1325, adopted in 2000, commits to the meaningful participation of women in peacebuilding efforts, with subsequent and complementary resolutions following. The UN Global Compact was developed in 2000 to encourage businesses worldwide to implement sustainable and socially responsible policies, of which gender equality is a key focus. The Sustainable Development Goals, rolled out in 2015, commit to gender equality as its fifth goal. These are but a few examples of how gender equality is becoming increasingly institutionalised as a priority for the UN.

Promoting a pro-rights agenda at local levels, whether that's within communities, organisations, or governments, is critical to creating international spaces that reflect the same.

The latest iteration of this dedication can be found in the fifth of 12 key commitments as laid out in Our Common Agenda, Secretary-General Guterres's vision for the future of global cooperation. Commitment number five speaks to placing women and girls at the centre, specifically citing a call to repeal gender discriminatory laws; promote gender parity; facilitate women's economic inclusion; include the voices of young women; and eradicate violence against women and girls.

Such commitments are more important than ever. Globally, women's and girl's rights are under threat. Just this year, the United States infamously repealed federal protection for the right to abortion access. Already, a multitude of stories have come out detailing the detrimental impact this policy change has had on reproductive health and wellbeing. This problem is not unique to the United States. Globally, the World Health Organization estimates that between 14,000 and 39,000 maternal deaths are caused because of a lack of access to safe abortion. Those who are historically marginalised, such as people of color, migrants, people with disabilities, and gender-nonconforming people are more acutely impacted by such policy changes.

Utilising an intersectional lens allows for a nuanced recognition that race, sexuality, and class, in addition to gender, influence how any given person interacts with power. When it comes to representation, it means that there is an abundance of lived experience involved in decisionmaking, resulting in more well-informed policies.



Anti-rights states don't only promote their agendas at home but use the UN to advance their aims as well. Some states have attempted to use UN Security Council Resolutions on Women, Peace and Security, which have a primary focus on increasing women's representation and leadership in peacebuilding, to remove phrases like "reproductive health" from the agenda. Anti-rights actors specifically target language and policies that challenge traditional patriarchal norms. This means that policies focusing on gender identity, sexual orientation, accountability for gender-based violence, or the promotion of sexual and reproductive health and rights come under particular attack.

Collaboration with feminist civil society can look like forming civil society advisory groups to allow for accountability. It can look like running consultations to onboard feedback from people with lived experience for any given policy area. It can look like hosting briefings for political leaders with regional expertise.

Mechanisms like Our Common Agenda act as a safeguard against such anti-rights interventions by developing new, UN-led norms on equality, sustainability, and peace. It ensures that the UN presents itself as a space that functions primarily to promote human rights and hold anti-rights actors accountable. The pledge for gender parity under the fifth commitment to centre women and girls is a critical mechanism for unlocking more thorough women's representation and participation in global decisionmaking, both at the UN and at domestic levels. But more is needed to be effective. I propose the following recommendations as a means to both implement and build on Our Common Agenda.

1. Link short term goals with long term goals

Women's representation reflects a shorter term goal focused on inclusion in existing systems. Whilst crucial, such an action tends to be more status quo-friendly and adhere to, rather than challenge, systems of oppression. For this reason, the call for greater women's representation must be embedded within an agenda that engages with the long-term work of reducing sexism, racism, and classism, among other discriminatory hierarchies. Creating a gender equal multilateral system, then, takes women's representation and participation as a first step in the long-term project of institutional reform toward more feminist and rights-based values. Alongside this, examining who is and is not taken seriously as leaders and participants in multilateral spaces sheds light on the way that oppressive norms still have influence. Undergoing such an assessment can identify areas in need of further reform and set out the plan for long-term change.

2. Integrate intersectional perspectives

Agendas in pursuit of gender equality can often slip into speaking about the vague category of 'women and girls' without further distinction. The rights of women and girls, of course, are at the heart of any good gender equality initiative. However, a more nuanced understanding of how social categories influence a person's experience and access to rights is necessary as gender equality means equality for all, regardless of gender; this includes men and gender non-conforming people too.

Utilising an intersectional lens allows for a nuanced recognition that race, sexuality, and class, in addition to gender, influence how any given person interacts with power. When it comes to representation, it means that there is an abundance of lived experience involved in decisionmaking, resulting in more well-informed policies. As a method of analysis, intersectionality calls attention to the often overlooked needs of people facing multiple forms of discrimination. A focus solely on women and girls in policy making spaces doesn't adequately do justice to the experience that a migrant woman of colour might have.

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3. Follow the lead of feminist civil society

Promoting a pro-rights agenda at local levels, whether that's within communities, organisations, or governments, is critical to creating international spaces that reflect the same. Feminist civil society has long led the grassroots call for integrating local and global action.

Collaboration with feminist civil society can look like forming civil society advisory groups to allow for accountability. It can look like running consultations to onboard feedback from people with lived experience for any given policy area. It can look like hosting briefings for political leaders with regional expertise. Regardless of the mechanism, establishing open and communicative links between institutions and feminist civil society is critical to understanding how gender equality can be achieved.



4. Link the local and the global to ensure policy coherence

Cutting across many of the other recommendations, linking local and global action is key to securing a gender equal multilateral system - and wider society. It almost goes without saying, but achieving gender equality in multilateral spaces is not possible if the people who make up that space aren't all convinced of the need for equality. The dissonance between UN initiatives like Our Common Agenda and anti-gender and anti-rights legislation in some countries is one of the most significant barriers to achieving this.

Even for states that champion human rights and gender equality, policy coherence can often be lacking. International commitments to agendas like Women, Peace and Security, for example, are easy to come by in most countries around the world. However, the commitment to women's inclusion in other aspects of policy building is wanting. Any commitment to gender equality means a commitment to integrating this goal across every team, department, and policy area.

Equality for people regardless of their gender identity isn't a utopia, but something that can be achieved here and now with decisive and bold action.

5. Appropriate funding

Lastly, gender equality initiatives must be sufficiently resourced in order to be successful. Whether that's funding for feminist civil society action or funding for recruitment campaigns for women in the civil service, each and every commitment must be backed up by adequate finances.

While tremendous gains have been achieved over the past century in the movement for gender equality, there is still a long way to go. The above recommendations can be implemented in multilateral spaces, in domestic policy decisionmaking circles, or in the private sector to strengthen and safeguard gender equality alongside efforts to increase women's representation and participation.

UN initiatives like Our Common Agenda are key to establishing new international rights- and values-based norms. And integrating such norms at every level of society will ensure that our multilateral spaces instinctively reflect these same commitments. Equality for people regardless of their gender identity isn't a utopia, but something that can be achieved here and now with decisive and bold action.



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