



WILPF STATEMENT
WILPF Executive Committee
Geneva, Switzerland
9 February 2017

Statement to the Member States of the United Nations

WILPF Calls on the UN to Uphold International Law and the Charter of the UN

The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) is the principal global intergovernmental body exclusively dedicated to the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women.

A declared principle, made during its first session in 1947, is: “to raise the status of women, irrespective of nationality, race, language or religion, to equality with men in all fields of human enterprise, and to eliminate all discrimination against women in the provisions of statutory law, in legal maxims or rules, or in interpretation of customary law.”

Each year WILPF brings women from all over the world to participate in the annual session in New York. In so doing, we strengthen the multilateral system and assist in upholding the Charter of the UN itself. The Charter recognises the significant role played by civil society in the work of the UN by making provision for formal participation of NGOs in UN processes.

On 27 January 2017, the US President issued an executive order banning all entry to the United States for people from Iraq, Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen, for a period of 90 days; suspending the entire US refugee admissions system for 120 days; and suspending the Syrian refugee programme indefinitely. The ban is now the subject of ongoing litigation in the US courts. The impact of this order and other resolutions passed by the US administration, and the unconstitutional reasoning presented to the public, go far beyond the targeted subjects. It has ignited language of hatred and discrimination which, in a system already far from equal, will have a grave and disproportionate impact on women.

This unilateral action by the United States will have a major impact on the ability of the UN to uphold the principles enunciated in the UN Charter, human rights law and indeed in the CSW. Women from the countries subject to the ban have either been denied visas or cannot, with any confidence, attend the CSW. Their struggles for equality, freedom and nonviolence will not be shared with activists and officials from around the world. Women who are able to attend will protest their absence and denounce the policies, but they will not be able to speak on behalf of those forced to be absent.



The outcome document is negotiated by member States, but is influenced by the information and evidence provided by civil society organisations (CSOs). In consequence, without CSOs and women from the seven named countries, and in reality, from most of the Middle East, WILPF believes that, absent measures to ensure inclusion, the process lacks legitimacy.

As a matter of principle, and in solidarity with our partners from excluded countries, WILPF International has, therefore, decided not to participate in the formal CSW61 process. The UN has obligations to uphold its own Charter, principles and practices agreed and acted upon over decades and grounded in human rights law. Clearly, the Executive Order undermines these obligations and indeed, the integrity of the UN; it prevents inclusivity and is discriminatory on prohibited grounds.

It is a stated core principle and belief of WILPF that international peace must be sought and guaranteed through the multilateral system. WILPF has engaged, supported and participated in the various functions of the UN system since its inception. We will continue to do so. It is incumbent on Member States to uphold the Charter of the UN, human rights and international law. To continue to do 'business as usual' in the face of this direct assault on rights, without comment, opposition, or an alternative proposal, is to bring into disrepute the system we have all worked for so long and so hard to create.

In this spirit we call on States, as representative of the 'People of these United Nations' to take up the human rights issues, the violation of the Refugee Convention and the disregard for the UN as an institution by the current US administration by calling on the US government, in public and in private, during CSW deliberations and elsewhere, to overturn the ban and ensure women's full and meaningful participation in all UN processes.

WILPF also calls on Member States to open real discussion on meaningful participation and the reforms of CSW and other UN processes. We ask States to reflect on how the Agreed Conclusions outcome document of CSW can be final without civil society consultations excluded from New York. We ask States to take concrete action to ensure women's full and effective participation for all.

To do less would be to be complicit in the undermining of international law and convention which the United Nations must uphold.