

Civil Society Watch

Civil Society Watch: Government's' Commitments to Action -- A Civil Society Parallel Event to the UN Global Leaders' Meeting on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment.

Sunday, 27 Sept., 9:00-4PM, CUNY Graduate Center, New York

On 27 September 2015 WILPF coalitions the Post2015 Women's Coalition and Women's Major Group facilitated a UN General Assembly parallel event at the CUNY Graduate Center entitled, "[Civil Society Watch](#): Government's' Commitments to Action -- A Civil Society Parallel Event to the UN Global Leaders' Meeting on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment.”

The organizers included Post2015 Women's Coalition, NGO CSW NY, Planned Parenthood Global, and Bahai International Community.

The event created space for civil society stakeholders to monitor global leaders commitments to advancing gender equality and women's empowerment, make their own commitment to the implementation of the (1995) Beijing Platform for Action, contribute to outreach including #WorldWeWant photo booth and innovative ideas marketplace, map an accountability scorecard, and share vision for the future of the feminist and women's movement.

While the event effectively created space for civil society mobilization, its occurrence separate to the high level events at UN Headquarters where governments were making commitments, illustrated the continued obstacles that civil society faces to meaningful participation event 20 years after Beijing.

Following an introductory session and space for monitoring UN commitments at the parallel global leader's event, the event facilitated five breakout sessions:

- Accountability
- Civil society action and community pledges
- Civil society access
- Youth
- Outreach, songs and stories

At a session on accountability facilitated by the Women's Major Group, participants shared new and innovative ways to collectively build accountability of leaders for commitments to action on gender equality, women's rights and women's empowerment. Activists contributed to ongoing outreach campaigns through social media on #Accountability for #WhatWomenWant and #FeministVision. They explored upcoming tools to strengthen accountability, including through the ongoing process of finalizing SDG indicators, and explored opportunities for developing scorecards and other tools for holding governments accountable on commitments to women's human rights over the next five years.

As a session on civil society action and community pledges facilitated by the Post2015 Women's Coalition, participants brought attention to the need to address root causes of conflict and invest in gender equitable development for sustainable development and peace, noting that "there can be no development peace, and no peace without development." Activists shared strategies to create change. This included: using local and community media and communications from twitter to radio programmes; developing evidence-based action that builds on traditional women's knowledge; supporting peer-to-peer spaces to exchange learning and mobilise among diverse communities; working with local actors including national ministries (trade, agriculture, and finance as well as women's ministries) alongside local and national civil society. Activists called for an international task force to hold UN system accountable for gender equality and women's empowerment, and called for stronger collaboration between UNWomen and civil society to ensure a meaningful participation of women led civil society.

At the session on civil society access facilitated by the Center for Women's Global Leadership (CSW), participants built on recommendations from the Gender Equality Architecture Reform (GEAR) campaign in providing a series of recommendations and commitments for action. This included: recommending strengthened mechanisms for partnership between civil society and UN Women that ensure multiple entry points and meaningful and ongoing engagement; ensuring that UN Women builds in ongoing space to listen to civil society voices, especially from conflict-affected societies, as well as supporting alternative spaces such as through People's General Assemblies. Activists reiterated the need for more effective action to support women human rights defenders, noting: "We should be seen as more than partners for implementing projects, but as leaders." They also called for increased accountability of donors to uphold women's human rights, and called for action by all stakeholders to ensure the women's human rights agenda is not watered down by the private sector. Activists called for UN Women to support political activism. They brought attention to the need for new monitoring and accountability systems to ensure realisation of human rights for all, and reiterated the importance of including women's human rights leaders in key discussions of global governance. They also brought attention to the need to create space for civil society to build consensus around priorities and action for holistic implementation of a women's human rights agenda.

At the session on youth organised by AWID, Resurj, and YWCA, participants exchanged lessons learned in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action and how intergenerational learning could be enhanced moving forward. They noted with concern how the Sustainable Development Goals discuss youth as a target audience rather than an actor in creation or implementation of the agenda. They also shared key areas of recommendations on how to change social norms and promote sustainable peace, including through: campaigns for peace and sexual and reproductive health and rights and using intergenerational and peer-to-peer learning to ensure youth participation in ongoing processes. Activists also reiterated the importance of both top down and bottom up approaches in order to link up efforts and coordinate action for change.

The event included space for networking and mobilization, as well as opportunities to share stories as part of social media outreach, and feminist drum circles. It concluded with report-backs from the breakout sessions and a call for continued collaboration for action.

Overall, the watch event created a welcome space for civil society mobilization. However, it was separated from the main high level meetings at UN Headquarters where governments were making commitments – ranging from China committing to providing \$10million of funding to UN Women, to Mexico committing to ensuring that 50% of their legislature would be women. Twenty years ago, forty thousand women leaders gathered 15 miles away in Huairou while governments negotiated the official declaration and programme of action in Beijing. Today, the same segregation continues in New York and around the world. This continued separation only reiterates the need for all of us to continue to take action to bridge these divides to ensure meaningful and ongoing women led civil society inclusion and action for effective implementation of commitments on women’s participation, protection, and rights both in and out of the conflict spectrum.