

Letter to the Members of the UN Commission on the Status of Women

MADRE, Just Associates (JASS), Center for Women's Global Leadership, Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID), Urgent Action Fund, Women in Migration Network (WIMN), Outright Action International

United Nations Economic and Social Council

The Commission on the Status of Women

Dear Members of the UN Commission on the Status of Women,

We the undersigned organizations write to express our deep concerns about the latest restrictions on civil society participation at the 2017 UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) meetings. This year's CSW is taking place under the shadow of the United States' escalated anti-immigrant, anti-refugee, and anti-Muslim policies, which are preventing some women from exercising their right to political participation at UN Headquarters in New York. The policies represent the latest in a long history of restrictive migration, refugee and asylum measures that subject women and their families to hate crimes, detention, deportation and family separation, while undermining core universal human rights regarding migrant and refugee rights, and worker protections. These circumstances emphasize the urgent need for women facing multiple discriminations to be at the center of conversations on human rights at CSW.

These restrictions on civil society participation are part of a much broader threat, not only to CSW, but also to the very foundations of multi-lateral cooperation, the rule of law and human rights. Governments across all continents have adopted laws and policies curtailing civil society participation in democratic spaces, making international space an even more critical site for civil society to confront and hold governments accountable. Civil society access to these spaces is necessary for the advancement of all human rights, including rights that ensure women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work. It is also necessary for the work of the UN. The new UN Secretary General, António Guterres, has affirmed that "civil society is a key instrument for the success of today's UN," and that "dialogue and cooperation with civil society will...be a central aspect of the activities of the UN in the next few years." For that to happen, civil society needs access to the UN, without discrimination on the basis of nationality, religion, income, migration status, or any other factor.

The latest obstacles to civil society participation at New York's UN Headquarters will likely extend beyond this year's CSW. Access to future CSW sessions, and to all UN decision-making spaces, including the Security Council and General Assembly, is also threatened. Year round, women and other gender justice advocates participate in critical

convenings at UN Headquarters, including during the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in May, the Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security in October, negotiations for a new Global Compact on Refugees and a Global Compact on migration, International Day of Persons with Disabilities, and LGBTIQ advocacy week in December. It is in New York that civil society advocates from across the globe engage with the world's governments in order to shape national and international priorities.

Maintaining access for civil society, particularly women's human rights defenders, to UN decision-making spaces is essential to the empowerment of women as envisioned in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the gender-responsive realization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. To this end, we respectfully request the Commission add the following paragraph to the draft Agreed Conclusions for CSW's 61st session, calling on governments to remove all barriers that directly and indirectly inhibit women's full, equal, and effective participation in decision-making at all levels:

- The Commission calls upon Governments to support civil society access to the CSW and all UN decision-making spaces, recognizing that meaningful civil society participation is critical for increasing protections and advancements for women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work.

We urge the Commission to call on governments to reverse the shrinking of civil society space at the United Nations during the CSW Ministerial segment and General discussion, so that we may fully contribute to the work of the Commission towards women's human rights and gender equality, including the gender-responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Sincerely,

MADRE

Just Associates (JASS)

Center for Women's Global Leadership

Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID)

Urgent Action Fund

Women in Migration Network (WIMN)

Outright Action International

Global Justice Center

Amnesty International

Refugees International

Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF)

NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security

Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq (OWFI)

International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN)

Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO)

Women's Intercultural Network (WIN)

Gender at Work

Alianza por la Solidaridad

Women Thrive Alliance

World Federalist Movement-Institute for Global Policy

Men Engage Alliance

Widows for Peace through Democracy (WPD)

SecurityWomen

Womankind Worldwide

Gender & Development Network

Women Peacemakers Program (WPP)

Women Engage for a Common Future (WECF), International

FEMUM-ALC latinamerican network of Women&Municipalities

Feminist Task Force

Center for Health and Gender Equity (CHANGE)

The Judith Trust

Uganda Youth Alliance For Family Planning And Adolescents Health –UYAFPAH

LatinoJustice PRLDEF

The Women's Studies Center (CEM)

Free Women Writers

Iranian Circle of Women's Intercultural Network (ICWIN)

Grupo Para o desenvolvimento da Mulher e Rapariga- (GDMR)

Muslims for Progressive Values Nederland

Sudanese Women Human Rights Defenders Project

FEMNET

Asia Safe Abortion Partnership

International Womens' Rights Action Watch Asia Pacific

International Planned Parenthood Federation - Western Hemisphere Region

FOKUS – Forum for Women and Development

MYSU Mujer y Salud En Uruguay

International Federation of Medical Students' Associations

Regions Refocus

RFSL - Swedish Federation for LGBTQ Rights

Akina Mama Wa Afrika

COC Nederland

Worker's Information Center

Human Rights & Gender Justice Clinic, City University of New York Law School

Republika Libre

Foro Internacional de Mujeres Indigenas - FIMI / International Indigenous Women Forum

Enlace Continental de Mujeres Indígenas de las Américas – ECMIA

The Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR)

Tunisian Association of Democratic Women (ATFD)

Khadija Arfaoui, TUNISIA

Tharwa n'fadhma n'soumer

Coalition for Sexual and Bodily Rights in Muslim Societies (CSBR)

GAYa Nusantara

PILIPINA Legal Resources Center

Southeast Indigenous Peoples' Center

PEN International

Women's Global Network for Reproductive Rights (WGNRR)

To add your organization's name to this letter, email csw61advocacy@madre.org.