

THE SOLIDARITY OF THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT: WILPF SPAIN'S CONTRIBUTION

WILPF International
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A few weeks ago, Spain underwent a review by the CEDAW Committee and was held accountable for its compliance to women's rights under the CEDAW Convention. WILPF Spain was there!

Many strong concerns affecting women in Spain have been brought up by Spanish NGOs to the Committee, notably, the burden of austerity measures that has been heavier on women's shoulders, persisting gender-based violence and gender equality policies relegated to a sub-thematic under the Ministry of Health. WILPF Spain of course echoed these concerns and supported other NGOs in their advocacy.

WILPF Spain members came to Geneva with a different priority: making Spain accountable for human rights violations it perpetrates outside of Spain and in particular, women's rights violations.

Around the world, gender-based violence is perpetrated with the direct or indirect use of a firearm. Spain is not supposed to sell or allow the sale of weapons to countries where those arms might be used for the commission of gender-based violence, as agreed under the Arms Trade Agreement. However, Spain authorised the sale of firearms to countries such as, Brazil and Guatemala with high rates of femicide. In this manner, Spain has contributed to human rights violations outside Spain.



The same goes for the actions of corporations. The Spanish Government has supported the globalisation of Spanish corporations, but this has not been accompanied by a legal framework ensuring that human rights violations are not perpetrated or facilitated by these corporations abroad. For instance, local companies that supply products to Spanish companies, especially in the textile and food sectors, have maintained illegal practices such

as 72-hour work-weeks, failed to provide legal contracts to working women or placed restrictions on their freedom of movement.

It is clear that Spain is responsible for ensuring that corporations, that have headquarters and assets in Spain, do not engage in activities that would be considered as illegal and unacceptable if conducted in Spain.

When we analyse human rights, we often look to countries in isolation. We hold states responsible for violations perpetrated within their country, but we forget to take into account the difference in power of each state, or the limits of their national jurisdiction.

When the Democratic Republic of Congo, India or Colombia were under review by the CEDAW Committee, our sisters from those sections came and strongly denounced the human rights violations committed in their countries and held their governments accountable. On these occasions, the CEDAW Committee very clearly stated that human rights of women must be respected.

However, it would be unfair to place the burden only on governments of the Global South and forget that those human rights violations cannot be avoided without the collaboration of other countries: arms exporters and home countries of large corporations in the North that contribute to conflicts around the world.

The women movement is a united group, where women from all kinds of backgrounds come to defend human rights, where we join in solidarity. It is time to show others that solidarity.

Pamela and Manuela came from our Spanish section to remind their government that Spain is not only to protect the human rights of women within its territory, but that human rights are universal. As such, Spain should not put women at risk of human rights violations outside its territory for instance, through its arms sales to Guatemala, Brazil, Libya, Egypt and many other countries with serious levels of violence. Spanish companies in Latin America are also violating the rights of indigenous peoples, contributing to conflicts and are violating labour rights.

After exchanging with WILPF and other civil society members, the CEDAW Committee exchanged views with Spain on their implementation of the CEDAW Convention. First, a member of the Committee asked Spain: "*What methodology do you have in place to ensure that your arms exports do not facilitate gender-based violence abroad?*". The Spanish delegation could not provide an answer. We know the answer because WILPF Spain has presented it in the Human Rights Council in the past: not enough transparency, not enough accountability.

The Committee insisted: “*You have obligations towards human rights of women abroad, how do you ensure Spanish corporations do not violate the rights of women for example labour rights?*”. Spain still could not provide an answer and a third time, members of the Committee insisted that their question had not been answered. Spain finally said they would present a written answer in which they provided policy measures (not legal or binding measures).

You can also hold your government accountable; you can get your WILPF section involved in our project to End Corporate Abuse. Write to your government, gather signatures, organise awareness raising events or you can simply sign our petition calling on the governments of the UK, the US, Italy, France, Germany and Spain to take action to end corporate abuse. Read our blog “[Protecting human rights from transnational companies: WILPF’s petition](#)” to learn more.