

Women's "8 Red Flags" Following The Conclusion Of The Open Working Group On Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

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The adoption of the Open Working Group final outcome document "is a significant step, but SDGs still lacking real ambition for urgent transformational change the world needs to achieve gender equality, women's human rights, sustainable development in harmony with nature, and end inequalities" said a statement released by the Women's Major Group on 21 July 2014.

On Saturday 19th of July, the first phase of a 2-year policy process at the United Nations, in which member states proposed a new set of global goals for sustainable development, ended. These new goals will follow in the footsteps of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and will determine new commitments and funding for sustainable development.

The General Assembly's (GA) Open Working Group (OWG) on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) finished its mandate, and submits a report with a proposal for sustainable development goals to the 68th session of the UN General Assembly as part of the "Post 2015" process. The SDG process has been inclusive of all Member States as well as the Women's and other civil society Major Groups and we welcome this openness. We are convinced that civil society's full and meaningful participation in decision-making are among the essential aspects of our new global development agenda.

As a guiding framework for global development and cooperation for the next 15 years, the fate of humanity and our environment is at stake. The Women's Major Group, comprised of over 500 women's human rights, environment and development organizations, activists and academia, has substantively engaged in the consultations and negotiations throughout this two-year process presenting our analysis and contributions.

We commend those governments who have fought hard to secure and advance gender equality and the women's human rights throughout this process, and we deplore the countries who consistently have tried to delete language around women and girl's rights. We commend the co-chairs for forging a compromise with all member states and for not having given in to pressures to reduce the goals to the lowest common denominator. Even though the Women's Major Group believe that ambition should have been higher, the adoption of the SDG document by the Open Working Document is a significant step forward. It was a complex negotiation process amidst sharp differences and disputes among member states. Taking this political reality into consideration, the adoption of the SDG document is a commendable achievement.

We welcome: The standalone goal 5: "Achieve gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls" with its targets to end all forms of violence, discrimination, early and forced marriage and harmful practices against women and girls, universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, to ensure women's full participation in decision making, and equal rights to land and economic resources. We also welcome the fact that gender equality and women's rights are addressed in different goal areas including equal rights to education and life-long learning, to decent work and equal pay for work of equal value²; the stand alone goal on inequalities within and between countries, as this is imperative to addressing the root causes of poverty; and the targets to reverse the trend towards ever growing income inequalities by reforming global financial systems and fiscal measures; the goal on peaceful inclusive societies and its targets on participatory decision making, access to justice and reducing arms flow; the goal on Means of Implementation (MOI) and that in addition each goal area has its own set of implementation targets - although many of these MOI targets lack ambition, we welcome the fact that, unlike the MDGs, the agenda has standalone goals on ecosystems, ocean, sustainable consumption and production³ and a standalone goal on climate change which recognizes women's role ⁴; and that, the agenda comprehensively aims to end poverty and hunger, ensure healthy lives, universal access to water and sanitation for all.

However, the Women's Major Group has continuously called for stronger rights-based targets and a deeper transformation of our economic and financial systems, which we regret are not reflected in the outcome document: the proposed SDGs are still not sufficiently ambitious, transformative or rights-based, and we present our "red flags".

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Red Flag 1) Absence of human rights – The SDGs do not fully aim to protect and fulfil human rights for all which should be at the centre of a socially just and ecologically sustainable development agenda as well as the means for achieving it.

The recognition of Women's and Girls' human rights in the title of Goal 5 on gender equality, the human right to food, the right to water and sanitation as a goal, women's rights to decision making on peace and security, the rights of indigenous peoples, and the right for women to control their sexuality free of coercion, discrimination and violence (see red flag 2), amongst others are notably absent.

Red Flag 2) Sexual and reproductive health targets do not go far enough. We welcome the inclusion of commitments to universal access to sexual and reproductive health services, information and education and the protection of women's reproductive rights. However, the SDGs fall short of being a truly transformative agenda by failing to ensure the full respect, protection, and fulfilment of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) for all. At Rio+20, governments recognized that the rights of women, men and young people to control all matters related to their sexuality was critical for sustainable development. Yet, they failed to carry this commitment through. They also failed to recognize the necessity of providing comprehensive sexuality education to all young people, in and out of school. Sustainable development will only occur when young people understand their bodies, know their rights, and have the freedom and skills to negotiate on important aspects of their lives. Finally, while the SDGs are supposed to be a forward-looking agenda, the SDGs explicitly limit State's responsibilities to protect and promote reproductive rights to those already elaborated in existing agreements. This is not good enough. During this final session of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals, 58 Member States asserted that a "universally relevant, transformative, high-impact and cost-effective sustainable development agenda" relies fundamentally on the respect, promotion, protection of sexual and reproductive health and rights for all, including universal access to quality, comprehensive, integrated and affordable sexual and reproductive health information, education and services, as well as comprehensive sexuality education for all young people. Despite this overwhelming support, a vocal minority, including the Vatican and Saudi Arabia, has once again blocked consensus. Sexual and reproductive health and rights are fundamental to achieving gender equality, fulfilling women's human rights, and women and young people's health and wellbeing and they must be a clear priority in the Post-2015 Development Agenda.

Red Flag 3) Concentration of power and wealth imbalances that deepen poverty and inequalities within and between countries are not sufficiently addressed, and the agenda lacks targets to reverse this trend. For the SDGs to be transformative they need to acknowledge that the current development model based on growth has failed to address concentrations of wealth that are deepening poverty, inequalities, and environmental degradation. Every year the gap grows further. Currently, the 65 richest individuals own as much as the bottom 50% worldwide⁵. Just 5% of the 46.2 trillion-dollar wealth of the world's so called "High Net-Worth Individuals" is enough to cover the annual cost of a global social protection floor and climate change adaptation and mitigation combined. For the SDGs to be transformative, they must radically change the global political economy system through a redistributive framework that aims to reduce inequalities of wealth, power and resources between countries, within countries, between rich and poor, and between men and women. We welcome the goal on "Reducing Inequalities within and between countries" and the targets "to achieve and sustain income growth of the bottom 40% of the population at a rate higher than the national average", to "eliminate discriminatory laws", to "regulate financial markets", and to adopt "fiscal, wage and social protection policies". We regret that the SDGs should have failed to recognize the following language, in bold:

- 1) "Universal" social protection floors for all
- 2) "Progressive tax systems worldwide, including elimination of VAT for basic foods, medicines, sanitary products, the implementation of innovative financing mechanisms for development, such as global taxes, specially the financial transactions taxes⁶"
- 3) Eliminate illicit financial flows, "transfer pricing and tax havens" and "introduce a global corporate tax floor"

The SDGs must radically change the global economic system and dismantle the existing systems that channel resources and wealth from developing countries to wealthy countries, and from people to corporations. They also need to set targets to address the urgency and scale of human-induced climate change, ocean acidification and environmental degradation, be based on inter-generational justice, the planetary carrying capacity and ecological boundaries. For the SDGs to be ambitious, governments should have set much clearer unequivocal targets to a new course for the world, that ensures the planet's limited resources are used equitably and responsibly, acknowledging the historical debt of the few to the many, our responsibility to future generations, and that any real sustainable development must be in harmony with nature. Although we welcome language on debt relief and restructuring, access to justice, information and participation, and a "global partnership for development", women would have wanted to see stronger targets addressing:

- 1) Extraterritorial practices should have been addressed, ending impunity and transferring the burden, impacts and costs to States, citizens and the environment.
- 2) The needed reform of the global trade and finance agenda, including the responsibility of IFIs,

has been only partly addressed.

3) Transformation is not achieved by implementing rules which are flawed; therefore we oppose the too-static call for "rule of law" which too often enforces those already in power. We instead insist on access to justice to ensure human rights take precedent over short term economic interests.

Red Flag 4) The burden of unpaid domestic and care work still rely on women. Women still subsidize the entire economy by performing most of the unpaid domestic and care work, derived from the sexual division of labour. The outcome derived from it equals the 60% of the value produced in the world. This means that there is not enough money in the world to pay for the value generated by the work of women. The burden of those tasks are the main obstacle for women to fully exercise their rights, due that it demands from them an excessive time use and their entire energies.

Unpaid domestic and care work derives from discriminatory gender roles. This is a macroeconomic and structural agenda that affects developed and developing countries, deepening inequalities. We are glad to see a target on this issue, but feel it is not strong enough, and in addition to valuing unpaid work, the target 5.4 should have aimed to "reduce and redistribute" unpaid care and domestic work.

Red Flag 5) Lack of recognition of women as farmers, fishers, indigenous peoples and key for sustainable natural resource management. Half of the goals lack references to gender equality and women's human rights, particularly in the context of decision making on climate, oceans, ecosystems, fisheries, water and energy, including from rural, remote and pastoralist communities. There is a very concerning lack of recognition that small farmers, particularly women farmers, pastoralists, artisanal fishermen and women, and other small food providers are already feeding the majority of the world population, and are more productive per unit than large industrial agriculture, while maintaining the largest seed and livestock diversity. The call for more productivity based on gene banks and technology in goal 2, instead of supporting agro-ecology and the rights to land, water, diversity and livelihoods of small food providers and particularly women, is a step in a wrong direction, that will worsen hunger and resource erosion. The SDGs should have included:

- 1) Free and prior informed consent and rights of indigenous peoples
- 2) Women as decision makers, resource managers and experts on adaptation and disaster resilience in goals on water, energy, and management of ecosystems

Red Flag 6) Insufficient attention to women's role in peace and justice. We welcome the fact that the SDGs, – against much opposition – include a goal on "peaceful and inclusive societies", and that the goal on education includes a target on "strengthening a culture of peace and nonviolence", however, we regret that the targets do not include:

- (1) Ensuring women's full participation in peacekeeping, peace building, and reconstruction
- (2) Protection of women human rights defenders
- (3) Protection of vulnerable populations affected by crisis and conflict, including refugees and IDPs

In an agenda that is intended to ensure human dignity, the respect, protection, and fulfilment of the full range of human rights obligations must be central. Because of its focus on peace, rule of law, and access to justice, Goal 16 is a logical place to include many aspects of a human rights-based approach to development. We welcome the fact that the goal title makes reference to "accountability, and targets to "access to justice for all" and "inclusive participation" and "public access to information", however, specific provisions missing are:

- (1) Access to meaningful, affordable or free, and human rights-based justice systems for all individuals, and particularly for women and marginalized groups;
- (2) Financing these targets to support justice and participation in a meaningful way including by reducing and redirecting military spending.

Red flag 7) Concern around "partnership(s)" The myriad green lights given to private sector financing and partnerships for sustainable development, without any specific language on evaluations, accountability, transparency and overall governance, is deeply worrying. After long debates the outcome document on SDGs finally includes a reference to "enhancing the global partnership on Sustainable Development" between States, but this is weakened by the immediately following reference to voluntary, non-transparent public-private partnerships. There should be a Strengthened or Enhanced Partnership for Development in which the meaning is international cooperation on a broad range of key development issues, and mainly of a North/South basis. The partnership is one that is principally between governments of developed and developing countries, with the developed countries taking the lead in providing resources and the means of implementation. It is imperative to re-capture the term with its original meaning and NOT allow the term to be isolated only as partnerships with the private sector. Multi-stakeholder partnerships must absolutely be accompanied "with a UN-led governance framework that incorporates accountability, ex-ante assessment and criterion (such as having demonstrated sustainable development results), transparent reporting, independent evaluation, and monitoring mechanisms.

Red Flag 8) Technology focus remains on trade and private access Although technology is put forward in many different goals as an essential component to realize each goal, there is not a recognition of the urgent need for fair and equitable access to technology and to overcome intellectual property barriers, the need for developing countries to build and develop their own

technological base, and the extremely important need to integrate multilateral, independent, participatory evaluation of technologies for their potential social, economic, environmental and health impacts. The establishment of a Technology Transfer Mechanism that could address these aspects should have been clearly affirmed.

The way forward must ensure priority for women's and girl's human rights in the process and outcomes.

The work going forward will be to ensure that General Assembly negotiations take place based on the document as it stands now, as well as in a manner that is inclusive, transparent and accountable. Regarding the process forward, integrating the SDGs into the final Post-2015 Agenda, we call on the Secretary General and the General Assembly to not apply arbitrary reductions or "simplifications". Countries should only commit to further strengthening and to no further regressions of proposed goals and targets.

In this regard, accountability is essential for ensuring that States adhere to their commitments, including national and local level accountability mechanisms. Public participation, particularly from women and marginalized groups, in the design, implementation, and monitoring of international and national plans to implement the SDGs, should be a priority.

International accountability mechanisms, including intergovernmental mechanisms such as the HLPF and those within the Human Rights Council, in which they are all required to participate, should be established or strengthened to track progress on the Post-2015 Agenda.

Our focus in the coming year, leading up to the Post-2015 Summit in September 2015, will be to ensure that the Post-2015 Agenda will have strong financial commitments, with a focus on public funding for sustainable development based on a reform of current unsustainable financial and trade systems.

We must ensure that in the negotiations on the sustainable development financing package, from the Financing for Sustainable Development to the Post-2015 Summit, governments commit to women's equal say, equal access and equal share in access to finance and other Means of Implementation, and we call on governments to ensure a concrete and relevant set of MOI targets for the full realization of Goal 5, and to commit to "financing women's rights organisations".

We call on Member States to ensure strong participation of civil society including the Women's Major Group and other constituencies in the process leading up to and following the Post-2015 Summit in September 2015. The process must be inclusive, with full access and meaningful participation of Major Groups and civil society. It will be essential to transparency and integrity of the forthcoming negotiations, as has been demonstrated by our participation in the Open Working Group, where we have fostered essential links between the global and national levels.

Finally, we are concerned that women's bodies and lives continue to be subjected to national agendas where not always laws are made to guarantee our rights. We continue consistently calling for a truly universal agenda grounded in human rights. We refuse for our lives to be negotiating chips. Therefore, we expect nothing less than a transformative and universal agenda that will ensure a just, equitable and sustainable world in which all people, including for the women and girls who comprise 50% of the planet's population, will experience individual and collective well-being, a life in dignity and the full enjoyment of our human rights.

Organisations participating in the Women's Major Group at the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals

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