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Statement submitted by Sociologists for Women in Society, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Full and effective participation and decision-making in public life

Despite 2020 having all-time highs for women heads of state, heads of government, speakers of parliament, members of parliaments and ministers, political inequality still stands out as one of the areas with persistent high levels of gender inequality.

In the last decade, a worldwide gender backlash in relation to advances in gender equality has proliferated in Global North as well as Global South countries. Right-wing movements using sexism, homophobia and racism for political and electoral mobilization is evident in societies that have more recently transitioned from authoritarianism to democracy as well as in consolidated democracies.

The widespread use of sexism, homophobia, and racism in political campaigns has promoted gendered political violence. Women, especially women of colour, and LGBTQ candidates have increasingly been special targets of defamation campaigns, verbal and physical intimidation, threats and attacks.

In the name of a fight against the so-called “gender ideology”, the current radical conservative backlash has reinvigorated assaults on reproductive rights and LGBTQ rights and progress (such as gay marriage and greater openness to changing gender identities).

Political inequality: Representation in elected officials to National Parliaments and voting rights:

One of the main areas with persistent gender inequality since the first UN Conference is women’s representation in legislative branches. We are still far from meeting the goals of the Convention For the Elimination Of All Forms Of Discrimination Against Women and the Beijing Platform For Action. Progress has been slow: in 1945 3 per cent of members of parliament were women and in 2020 it only reached a 24.9 per cent world average. Women speakers of parliament still comprise only 20.5 per cent worldwide.

Despite growing political activism by women in local, national and transnational movements, such activism has not necessarily translated into political representation.

Political representation has not directly correlated with economic development. There are several countries in the Global South with the highest levels of political representation and several Global North countries with lower levels of representation (such as the United States with a higher participation rate achieved after the 2018 elections but only just close to the current world average of 25 per cent).

Despite women having conquered the right to vote worldwide (with a few exceptions) voter suppression and disenfranchisement is a persistent issue, especially for minority women, through legal and structural barriers seen in the case of Black, Indigenous, and Women of Colour in the United States.

Successful strategies to improve political representation have been

Various quota systems (adopted in Global South as well as Global North countries)

Grass-roots action and organization by feminist and women's movements and democratic organizations supporting women candidates of various races, ethnicities, sexual orientations, gender identities, and abilities

Social media presence and campaigns have given visibility and public attention in promoting support and fund-raising for women and minorities candidates, as well as raising issues such as domestic and sexual violence, women's empowerment and impacting public life, values, norms, and the law (such as in the MeToo movement global reach).

Recommendations to Member States to promote gender equality in elected offices

Establish gender quotas for legislative bodies and political parties' candidates to eliminate the gap in gender political representation and make elected offices inclusive of different races, ethnicities, sexual orientations, gender identities and abilities

Establish public financing for political campaigns that promote fair and equitable campaign financing to candidates of various races, ethnicities, sexual orientation, gender identities and abilities

Promote equal access to voting with specific legislation and program initiatives to remove all types of barriers to full participation in elections by all genders and other minority groups

Promote gender equality in access to internet and social media, which has proven to be an effective way to empower women decision-making in public life, influencing public opinion and the legislative and executive branches of government.

Representation in Executive branch/Ministerial positions

Heads of State/Government: in 2020 we still have a very small number of women heads of state (6.6 per cent) and women heads of government (6.2 per cent).

Gender parity in Ministerial appointments: in very few countries the rate is 30 per cent and above. In 2020 countries only 14 countries (8 in the Global South and 6 in the Global North) had 50 per cent or more of women in ministerial positions.

Representation at the United Nations

Since its founding in 1946 there have been 9 Secretary Generals of the UN, all men.

There are still low percentages of women as system managers in the UN.

There is a wide gender gap in the number of ambassadors heading national delegations to the United Nations

The Secretary General has pledged to reach parity at the senior leadership level across the UN system well before 2030.

Recommendations to Member States and the United Nations system:

Promote, approve and/or establish targets for quicker and effective implementation of gender parity in ministerial positions and other positions of power and leadership that are inclusive of different races, ethnicities, sexual orientations, gender identities and abilities.

Why is it important to eliminate the gender gap in representation in legislative and executive branches of government, and in the United Nations?

Gender equality in representation has been an important factor in:

Legislation (family law, violence against women laws, reproductive and sexual freedom, constitutional rights)

Public policies (to address gaps in economic opportunities and unpaid work, comprehensive health care, quality and free public education; paid parental leave and subsidized childcare, cash transfer/basic income programs)

Democracy and human rights (civil and political rights, economic and social rights, and cultural and environmental rights which support equity, sustainability and inclusion of all people).

Elimination of violence

Violence against women remains a serious problem worldwide with tremendous physical, psychological, social and economic impacts on the very fabric of all societies, particularly the persistence of sexual violence, intimate partner violence and police brutality. Women contend with daily risks and traumatic experiences across sexual, domestic, carceral, and intersectional threats and victimization. Black, Indigenous, and Women of Colour are particularly subject to racialized and carceral state violence, ranging from online misogynoir, terroristic threats and interpersonal homicides to police killings and various forms of misconduct through state detainment and supervision. All exacerbate persisting crises for marginalized families and communities and call for substantive attention and protections, along with speedy prosecutions and convictions.

It is estimated that 70 per cent of women worldwide have experienced physical and/or sexual violence from an intimate partner in their lifetime.

In the United States, nearly 1 in 6 women experience sexual violence; 1 in 4 suffer with domestic violence.

Women and girls account for over 70 per cent of world-wide trafficking victims with girls in experiencing astounding rates of bullying, cyber-harassment and sexual violence at school.

Violence against women, especially gender and sexual violence, occurs in every recorded armed conflict and genocide.

Such high rates of violence across all social spheres has a profound effect on women's ability to succeed in all areas of life.

Younger, racial minority, and queer/transgender women live with underreported, additional harms and greater susceptibility at the intersection of race, gender, class, and other social locations.

Recommendations to Member States:

Adopt anti-violence strategies in government policies such as defunding and abolition of violent carceral state practices and agencies with funding reallocation to community-engaged organizations/agencies for services and programs that advance women and children, disadvantaged Black and brown especially

Provide training and educational programs in gender sensitivity and anti-violence strategies for judges, police, and other security and law enforcement personnel

Invest in formal reporting channels, safe houses, and policies which aim to support women escaping violent situations and reporting violence to establish comprehensive networks of governmental, non-governmental, and community-based anti-violence organizations. This would also allow for better mechanisms of accountability within the UN system, particularly on sexual violence by peacekeepers and sexual violence against women peacekeepers

Invest in the economic uplift of the safety-net for women to escape violent situations without the fear of homelessness for themselves and their families

Especially during times of global health, economic and racial crises, re-focus on violence- prevention initiatives/programs that centre gender-based, intersectional education for all to learn about the various types and forms of violence and toxic masculinities

Promote more mixed-methods research that measures the rate and impact of all types of violence against women and girls for more evidence-based and transparent policies locally, nationally and transnationally.
