

Civil Society Organizations Call on UN Women to Prioritize Economic and Social Rights

Commission on the Status of Women Submission

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The Center for Women's Global Leadership (CWGL) and the organizations listed below welcome the priority theme for the fifty-third session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) on, "access and participation of women and girls to education, training, science and technology, including for the promotion of women's equal access to full employment and decent work." We also welcome the creation of UN Women. This is an opportune time for the UN system, and UN Women in particular, to focus on addressing economic and social rights of women and girls, and the increasing inequalities they face especially in the aftermath of the recent global economic crisis. In the current economic crisis women are confronted with insurmountable challenges including:

- Women performing 66 percent of the world's work, producing 50 percent of the food, but earning 10 percent of the income and owning 1 percent of the property.ⁱ
- The expectation that the global economic crisis will plunge a further 22 million women into unemployment, which would lead to a female unemployment rate of 7.4 percent (versus 7 percent of male unemployment).ⁱⁱ
- Education systems will sustain severe damage – and children marginalized by poverty, gender and ethnicity stand to bear the brunt.ⁱⁱⁱ
- The challenges that are posed by the overrepresentation of women in vulnerable unemployment. According to the ILO, there are countries where vulnerable employment for women continues to increase and countries where the shares of women in vulnerable employment remain above 75 percent. The move away from vulnerable employment into wage and salaried work can be a major step toward economic freedom and self-determination for many women.^{iv}

Given these challenges, it is vital that UN Women address women and girls' access to education, training, science and technology, and the promotion of women's equal access to full employment and decent work from a human rights perspective, rather than simply as an instrument for faster economic growth.

All governments have the obligation to respect, protect and fulfil economic and social rights, for women and men on an equal basis. This is too often forgotten when international loans and trade

Center for Women's Global Leadership, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey
160 Ryders Lane, New Brunswick, New Jersey 08901, www.cwgl.rutgers.edu, cwgl@rci.rutgers.edu



agreements are negotiated; when national budgets are drawn up; when central banks determine interest rates; when systems for regulating banks and corporations are redesigned.

As a result, many women are not experiencing the realization of their economic and social rights. The UN can play a role in prioritizing these issues and UN Women can be the vehicle for doing so.

Civil society organizations, especially women's and grassroots organizations, are well placed to provide significant programming and policy expertise to UN Women on how the UN and Member States can advance women's human rights and achieve gender equality. Therefore, mechanisms that include meaningful civil society participation in UN Women at headquarters, at the regional and country level must be established.

Thus, we call on UN Women to give priority to enhancing the analytical capacity and practical programming to support governments in meeting economic and social rights obligations; and to support women's organizations in holding governments accountable for the way in which they design and implement economic policies. To this end we encourage member states to increase their financial support for UN Women in the aforementioned programmatic areas.

Submitted by The Center for Women's Global Leadership (CWGL), and Centre for Economic and Social Rights(CESR), ESCR-Net Secretariat, Canadian Feminist Alliance for International Action (FAFIA), SILAKA—Cambodia, South Asia Women's Watch (SAWW), National Alliance of Women--India (NAWO), Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN), ESCR-Net Secretariat, Asia Pacific Women's Watch (APWW), Association of Women's Rights in Development (AWID), and the Network of East-West Women (NEWW), to the Commission on The Status of Women, 2011.

ⁱ UNICEF, 'Gender Equality – The Big Picture', 2007

ⁱⁱ ILO, 'Global Employment Trends for Women', 2009

ⁱⁱⁱ UNESCO, 'Reaching the Marginalized', 2010

^{iv} ILO, 'Women in Labor Markets: Measuring Progress and Identifying Challenges', 2010