

Center for Women's Global Leadership statement to the 57th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW57)

The Center for Women's Global Leadership (CWGL) at Rutgers University welcomes the 57th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) and the opportunity it presents to further the work of Member States on gender equity, women's empowerment, and the end of violence against women. We look forward to the Commission's consideration of the priority theme on the "elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls," and the review theme "the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS."

Since its founding in 1989, CWGL has worked to develop and facilitate women's leadership for women's human rights and social justice worldwide, including promoting an end to violence against women. Within this context we have worked in partnership with thousands of women's rights groups around the world to monitor UN processes and contribute to the reform of the United Nations gender equality architecture. In addition, our international 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence campaign mobilizes thousands of activists worldwide to increase awareness of gender-based violence and call governments to respond, protect, and prevent such violence.

Women's security and well-being are compromised by both the threat and experience of violence in the public and private spheres, and are particularly compromised for women living in conflict and post-conflict situations. Militarism not only undermines women's rights as a whole, but also women's dignity and bodily integrity. Over the last three years the 16 Days Campaign has worked with women's organizations and gender equality advocates worldwide to highlight the linkages between gender-based violence and militarism within the following five areas: (i) political violence against women; (ii) the proliferation of small arms and their role in domestic violence; (iii) sexual violence during and post-conflict; (iv) the role of state actors as perpetrators of sexual and gender-based violence; and (v) the roles of women, peace and human rights movements in challenging the links between militarism and violence against women.

As set out in the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action in 1993, Member States affirmed that "the human rights of women and of the girl-child are an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights," and asserted that "gender-based violence and all forms of sexual harassment and exploitation...are incompatible with the dignity and worth of the human person, and must be eliminated" (paragraph 18). Since that time, States have reaffirmed their commitment to ending violence against women through the adoption of the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the agreed conclusions of the 42nd and 51st sessions of the CSW, and Security Council resolutions 1325, 1820, 1888, 1889, and 1960.

Despite these international and national commitments, and as States gather to evaluate progress on gender equality at the 57th Session of the CSW, violence against women persists as a widespread and pervasive human rights violation. Recent reports on gender-based violence by the Secretary General (2006), the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (2011), and the

Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences (2012) have all noted the prevalence of violence against women worldwide.

The impacts of such violence are all encompassing, with material, institutional and psychological impacts on individuals, families, communities and society as a whole. Women's experiences of violence are manifested in multiple forms of discrimination, and greatly influence their access to economic, social and cultural rights. As stated in the Secretary-General's 2006 in-depth study on all forms of violence against women, "as long as violence against women continues, we cannot claim to be making real progress towards equality, development and peace" (paragraph 1). The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and its General Recommendation No. 12 clearly makes these links.

In addition, the ability of States to prevent, protect and respond to gender-based violence is compromised during economic and other crises. The Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences (A/HRC/17/26) highlighted the linkages between violence against women and violations of women's economic, social and cultural rights, noting that "economic and social security...is crucial for both protecting and preventing violence against women" (paragraph 73).

CWGL calls on Member States to implement their agreed recommendations, respect international human rights law and agreements, and commit to the principles and goals embodied within them. Specifically, CWGL strongly urges Member States to:

- (a) Pursue, by all appropriate means and without delay, policies to eliminate violence against women, strengthen the rule of law and the capacities of civilian and military justice systems to address gender-based violence, and ensure that women have access to mechanisms of justice and equal protection of the law and affordable health care, including psycho-social care;
- (b) Strengthen the capacities of all personnel in the legal and criminal justice, health and education systems to meet the needs and secure the rights of victims and survivors of gender-based violence through education, training and other capacity-building programs;
- (c) Ensure that State actors do not commit acts of gender-based violence, bring to full justice all perpetrators, strengthen institutional safeguards against impunity, and provide remedies and redress to victims and survivors;
- (d) Maximize resources to support survivors of gender-based violence, prevent such violence, eliminate discrimination against women, promote gender equality and ensure non-retrogression;
- (e) Ratify and implement without reservations all human rights treaties, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and its Optional Protocol;

- (f) Recognize that a culture of militarism promotes and reinforces a culture of violence and take necessary measures to facilitate disarmament and promote peace, including through ratification and implementation of the Arms Trade Treaty;
- (g) Facilitate the access of women to full participation in peace-building, peace-keeping, and political decision-making processes;
- (h) Invest in those programs and projects that promote human security; and
- (i) Respect, protect, promote and fulfill all human rights.

Developing and implementing multi-sectoral responses to eliminate gender-based violence are essential for Member States to fulfill their human rights obligations. CWGL calls on the Commission on the Status of Women to facilitate leadership in this regard. CWGL urges States to strengthen implementation of policies aimed at eliminating gender-based violence, and remains committed to working with women's organizations and the United Nations in building a more peaceful world.