

WHRC report on UN activities

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Slide 1 – CEDAW, CSW, NGO CSW, UNWomen and the appropriation of feminism

I'm going to start with a lot of acronyms. CEDAW is the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women. It was adopted by the UN in 1979 and was the culmination of more than 30 years' work by CSW, the UN Commission on the Status of Women, which is the principal global intergovernmental body for promoting women's rights and shaping sex equality standards. CEDAW is the document on which our Declaration on Women's Sex-Based Rights is based.

CSW holds an annual two-week gathering in New York where representatives from UN member states meet to discuss progress in implementing the 1995 Beijing Declaration, among other things. During this fortnight, NGO CSW also takes place. This is a gathering of civilian NGOs with an apparent women's rights focus which is supposed to work to ensure the voices of women's rights and feminist organisations are heard by CSW.

UNWomen was set up in 2010 to support women's equality and freedom from discrimination as set out in CEDAW. It should be the primary instrument standing up for the rights of women and girls. UNWomen, along with Mexico and France have organized the Generation Equality Forum which should have ended last year. This is a series of meetings intended to renew commitments to advance women's rights 25 years after the Beijing platform. They created Action Coalitions to decide the new agenda, collaborate and find funding from with companies, philanthropists, governments, civil society and UN agencies for the next 5 years.

We should be able to look to UNWomen as the defender of our rights as set out in CEDAW but sadly this is not the case, as we know first-hand from our own experience at NGOCSW65 this year.

UNWomen has lost sight of its brief. Instead of defending our sex-based rights and working to eliminate sex discrimination it has been redefining feminism, appropriating our language and destroying its meaning. Determined efforts by large funding bodies and NGOs to persuade the UN to replace the category of sex with 'gender identity' are having an effect.

Hundreds of millions of dollars have poured into UNWomen from groups representing monied male interests, including \$100m alone from Open Society Foundations. UNWomen has responded to this by appropriating the language of feminism to declare a new 'feminism' that includes worrying concepts such as 'bodily autonomy', adolescents' capacity to consent to sex and the horrifying demand that all aspects of 'sex work' be decriminalised.

As a feminist more knowledgeable than me said, 'This is not feminism, this is bullshit.'

Slide 2 – WHRC action

Women volunteering for WHRC and in other international women's rights organisations thought it was imperative that we contact as many national UN representatives as possible to warn them of the

consequences of replacing sex and sex-based discrimination with 'gender identity' – stereotyped roles which favour men and disadvantage women.

We assumed the best intentions of UN representatives. Gender ideology is a wolf in sheep's clothing, presenting itself as inherently feminist and progressive, while causing considerable harm to women and girls. It has progressed rapidly through UN agencies and national governments without debate or scrutiny. So many people, even those who should make it their business to understand the issues involved, are still unaware, or perhaps unwilling to learn, of the harms that gender ideology is causing.

We pointed out that endorsing the idea that being a woman or a man was not a material biological fact but a metaphysical state based on stereotypes will do nothing to reduce the oppression of women. We warned that including this apparently neutral new language into national and international legal frameworks will not only disguise male violence against women but will also dismantle any advances towards achieving substantive equality for women.

WHRC produced a letter and an infographic, translated into several languages, provided some instructions and encouraged our signatories to send it out. We also issued a press release and did some promotion on social media. You can find all these resources on our website.

Slide 3 – The results

The Generation Equality Forum concluded with its Global Acceleration Plan, in which the language of feminism is appropriated and redefined, and the new language dominates funding and state actions.

<https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2021/7/press-release-generation-equality-forum-concludes-with-commitments-and-global-acceleration-plan>

'Women and girls' have been reduced to 'women in all their diversity', a new euphemism that includes trans-identified people, non-binary identified people and 'sex workers'. 'Bodily autonomy' has been adopted as a new discourse that opens the door to all the industries that make profit from women and girls' bodies. UNWomen's remit to defend our rights has been effectively destroyed as large funding bodies representing moneyed male interests demand that gender erases sex. 'Intersectionality' has become the new 'in' thing – and instead of referring to the intersection of different forms of discrimination as mentioned in CEDAW, the new intersectionality simply means that males and their interests must now be included in every aspect of work to improve women's rights.

The Global Acceleration Plan is a depressing, incoherent and self-congratulatory document, full of euphemisms and disguising language that attempts to hide its total lack of structural feminist analysis. Despite this, we think our campaigns are having an effect within the UN, UN agencies and associated NGOs and they are starting to pay attention. The ridiculous 'Affirmation of Feminist Principles' was released shortly after our warning letter went out, which we think may be a direct response to our own Declaration on Women's Sex-Based Rights. The Global Acceleration Plan itself contains fewer references to red flag terms such as 'sex work' and 'children's rights' than we might have expected.

We think that sharing our messages is having an effect – we are enormously grateful to everyone who has taken part so far and have plans for more actions over the coming months.

Slide 4 – What can we do?

The UN and its agencies are funded through our taxes. Tax money paid by women all over the world is being used to erase our sex-based rights, our means to describe discrimination against us and the language that defines our experiences. We believe these agencies must be held to account by those that fund them and by individuals.

So-called 'Feminist' declarations such as that published by the Women's Rights Caucus in 2020 and the recent 'Affirmation of Feminist Principles' instrumentalise the global south in order to set an agenda, for example, for "sex work" which suggests it is a viable income alternative for poor women. Feminists know better than that and understand it is a structural system of exploitation, wherever it happens and using mostly vulnerable women and girls. We oppose this instrumentalisation and must act globally to make our governments in the global north accountable for the money that is spent to promote systems of exploitation. We know men are the main lobbyists for the total decriminalisation or legalisation of pimping, trafficking and sex-buying worldwide.

The Global Acceleration Plan from Generation Equality refers to 'Action Coalitions' – groups of states, NGOs and corporations that will be involved in carrying out their key objectives. WHRC intends to contact all the states, NGOs and corporations involved in these Action Coalitions to pass on our warning about the consequences of replacing sex with 'gender identity'. We also plan to contact UNWomen's top 20 government funders – to ensure all have a full understanding of what it is they are funding and that they can see there are women like us who resist and are prepared to demand that they be publicly accountable for their actions.

We are planning to produce a list of states, NGOs and corporations involved in the Action Coalitions, along with example letters and suggested contacts. Any resources we create for this next step will be made available on our website for use by individuals and groups.

This week we also launched a letter-writing campaign. We are asking women to send a complaint to the UN to let them know how gender ideology is harming women's rights. Anyone can complain – see our website for more details.

Although taking on the might of the UN and national governments may seem like an insurmountable task we believe that it is still possible to make a difference. For example, some of UNWomen's top state funders, such as Sweden, are abolitionist. Women in Sweden could write to their government asking that any future funding be withheld from organisation that claims sexual exploitation is employment.

We know that letters signed by WHRC have been taken note of by officials at UNWomen. There are 19,000 of us and growing all the time. We have power. If we speak up together, we can be heard.