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Centring Dialogue, Decision Making and Dissent: The Young Feminist Vision for a Civic World

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* The views expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent those of UN-Women, the United Nations or any of its affiliated organizations.

1. Overview

This statement is in the context of acknowledgement, aspiration, and accountability that our generation is ready to co-create for a collective response for things we are grateful for and for many of those that we want to deplore and correct. We also mark this with our reflection to stand in solidarity with many of us who are constantly affected in the era of growing polycrisis and have exacerbated difficulties in equal participation and leadership in decision making processes in especially those spaces and platforms that are about them but unfortunately without their meaningful participation or leadership.

Our generation demands that we sit in discomfort and hold each other accountable to engage in deep dialogue to address the fragmented response to the growing capitalistic, patriarchal and anti-rights wave across the world. We urge to find a systemic response to the challenges we face today to ensure that globalisation and multilateralism become a positive force for all the people across the world, instead of leaving billions of them behind in squalor.

We therefore ask these questions as the young feminist constituencies that come from our lived experiences and act as guiding reflections for our collective feminist vision for the future.

In the principle of “nothing about us, without us”, how do you ensure that young people are not just beneficiaries but part of decision making? Who will make the investment in this process, and how will we hold them accountable?

In the principle of “leave no one behind”, how do you ensure that processes are inclusive, accessible, and just? What about those of our colleagues, peers and friends who continue to face depleting democracies and growing militarism in their regions and countries?

In the principle of “having a seat at the table”, how do you recognize the systemic and historic exclusion of youth, especially those marginalized on the basis of gender, race, caste, class, and other multiple intersections? When and how will you expand the table?

2. Context

With just five years, three months and 21 days left for SDG commitments to be accomplished, we are surprised and shocked at the lack of shared accountability for systemic and transformative change. The Sustainable Development Goal for Gender Equality for example does not have regular data or accountability on the missing commitments and limited sense of inter-ministerial and inter-governmental support. This has in turn left to feminist movements and civil society to play a crucial role in being the key drivers for systemic change and social transformation which is essential for achieving the SDG agenda.

We need to start looking at modelling the rejection of colonial powers, and the structures of imperialism fuelled by in this case, the colonial authority that have given unhinged powers to growing military and capitalistic authorities and global war that has led to generational impacts across the world and especially in the context of the deeper dehumanization, apartheid, genocide and ethnic cleansing in Palestine and also the unrest and state facilitated violence in countries like Kenya, Congo, Bangladesh and many other across different regions that are moving towards authoritarianism and autocratic state leadership and power.

As youth leaders, commitment makers, and representatives across the Generation Equality Forum Ecosystem we have first-hand witnessed the challenges as well as the opportunities of building multistakeholderism guided by the feminist principles of co-creation, co-ownership, and co-leadership of young people in all their diversity across processes and projects. We realize the need to challenge the status quo to ensure intergenerational equity. Our work needs to focus on fostering redistribution of power, addressing historic exclusion of marginalized groups, and strengthening trust amongst stakeholders.

In the era of push back, for someone who has been engaged and entered into this space from seeing a multi-stakeholder process, how do we continue to hold the line and at the same time also make sure we have enough and more to support, engage, seek accountability for and take action on that builds our movement stronger and with renewed commitments.

The global scenario on promoting gender equity has to put into consideration efforts for deepening of the solidarity within feminist movements and across social, racial, reproductive and climate justice movements, to integrate intersectionality as a central approach, and to act on the demands of young feminists, including those presented in the Young Feminist Manifesto published during the Generation Equality Forum for full and meaningful participation and young feminist-led decision-making spaces.

It is important to increase focus on responding to the anti-rights forces that are increasingly well-funded and well organized, resulting in further contraction of civic space – both online and offline. Attacks and violence including reprisals for those who resist these forces especially women’s human rights defenders and climate justice advocates and reproductive rights activists have increased over the years systematically and has had state as well as capitalist powers playing to this in several regions. Women and feminist activists and leaders are also targeted as a means to push them out of politics and decision-making spaces, at all levels and spheres of government, especially as they seek accountability and advance gender equality and promote feminist agendas.

Growing trends in this regard has also observed a shrinking of financial investments in feminist organizations and increased restrictions on civic spaces and opportunities for collectivization and mobilization thereby increasing barriers for feminist action and leadership.

We know thus that oppressive regulations and laws are harassing us and attacking our bodies, our civil liberties, our freedoms of expression and opinion, and instrumentalizing our labour. Global reports have indicated state sponsored surveillance, increase in criminalisation and incarceration of women, girls and gender diverse youth for seeking accountability and fundamental rights. Disinformation and misinformation are more easily accessible through systemic blockage of knowledge about our rights which is crucial to exercise it.

3. Call to action

We call on these diverse stakeholders to provide and increase financial, legal and policy support for feminist movements and organizations in addition to committing to practicing feminist principles and feminist leadership, shifting, and sharing power with historically marginalized groups and people, and promoting gender equality, parity and justice, and women and feminist leaders' participation and empowerment in all decision-making spaces. It is crucial to advance gender parity and the inclusion of those historically marginalized in all aspects, sectors and levels of public and economic decision-making, including the private sector, civil society, international organizations, political and government institutions and executive and legislative positions. We call for promotion and expansion of feminist, gender transformative, intersectional approaches to decision-making and leadership to acknowledge, analyse and challenge existing power relations and advances inclusive, gender transformative and rights-affirming laws and policies.

Our collective attempt should focus on boosting local ownership that allows for marginalized voices to be able to include themselves and create and influence the agenda for change. It is also important to forge partnership and enable multi partner initiatives and create transparent mechanisms for resource sharing and agenda setting. Let's start by rotating positions of power in the decision-making processes and make intersectional representation possible. To this regard, establishing mentoring and feminist accompaniment processes that allow for strengthening the movement with more actors is the need of the hour.

It is time to create a transformative agenda with the three components of climate justice, gender equality, diversity and inclusion and civic rights and liberty in the digital age to ensure mainstreaming of gender justice and rights.

What we need now more than ever is to recognise, support and acknowledge the power of strengthening an ecosystem of feminist intersectional and youth led and inter-generational movements, the power of collaboration and integration of policies at local, national, regional and global levels. This will make our agenda to have a more strategic action and design systems that respond to our lived realities. We need to have accountable, transparent, participatory, decentralized and just institutions and processes that enable decision making to be shared with movement leaders across different levels. Let's bring back those who got left behind, if the room

is small by including more chairs around the table, let's create more rooms and more platforms for feminist, substantive leadership across the spectrum.