

UN Commission on the Status of Women Closes with Renewed Commitment to Gender Equality

Monday, 20 March 2023

The 67th session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), the main intergovernmental body dedicated to gender equality, came to a close on Saturday, 18 March 2023, after negotiations on the text of the agreed conclusions stretched into the early hours after the official final day of the conference.

The Women’s Rights Caucus (WRC)—a global intersectional and inclusive coalition of more than 200 feminist organizations, networks, and collectives that advocates for gender equality at the United Nations—welcomes the adoption of the agreed conclusions around the theme “Innovation and Technological Change and Education in the Digital Age for Achieving Gender Equality and the Empowerment of All Women and Girls.” This includes the renewal of a global commitment to achieving inclusive gender equality, despite significant pushback on fundamental issues within this agenda. We are encouraged to see continued multilateral support to advance the human rights of women and girls in all their diversity, as reflected in this year’s outcome.

The WRC was heartened by the increased participation and engagement of young feminists in this year’s CSW, including through interactive dialogues with youth leaders and the Youth Forum, as well as involvement of the Young Feminist Caucus (YFC). In particular, we are encouraged by several references to adolescent girls throughout the CSW text, including Member States’ recognition that adolescent girls are part of the most digitally connected generation in history and can disproportionately face discrimination and violence that occurs through or is amplified by the use of technology.

We are also encouraged to see progress made in this year’s Agreed Conclusions in recognizing:

- The need to ensure that human rights are promoted, respected, and fulfilled in the conception, design, development, deployment, evaluation, and regulation of technologies and to ensure that they are subject to adequate safeguards in order to promote an open, secure, stable, and accessible and affordable information and communications technology environment for all women and girls.
- Strong focus on policy actions for the elimination and prevention of all forms of violence, including gender-based violence that occurs through or is amplified by the use of technologies, with particular emphasis on victims and survivors-centered approaches.

- The potential of technology to promote women's and girls' human rights, but also to perpetuate gender stereotypes and negative social norms, amplified and perpetuated through digital tools as well as gender bias in technology.
- The critical role digital platforms can play as spaces where all women can advocate, mobilize and participate fully, equally, and meaningfully in public life.
- The importance of labor rights in addressing the challenges of technological change in the world of work. The conclusions also recognize the importance of addressing occupational segregation and the reality that women are more likely to lose jobs because of automation and digitalization. These barriers to women's economic justice have not been adequately addressed in previous CSWs.
- The addition of 'non-consensual' when speaking of outlawing the sharing of sexual or otherwise explicit materials, which reflects the rights of sex workers while safeguarding victims of deep fakes or sextortion, both examples of gender-based violence facilitated by the use of technology, specific to the priority theme of this year's CSW.

Furthermore, the Agreed Conclusions also acknowledged:

- That multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and marginalization are obstacles to the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the context of innovation and technological change, and education in the digital age.
- The important role of digital health including digital health technologies, digital tools, telemedicine and mobile health for ensuring universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services, including for family planning, information and education, as well as the need to protect personal information.
- That there is a pressing need to address the major impediments that developing countries and small island developing states face in accessing and using new technologies, stressing the need to close the digital divides, both between and within countries, including the rural-urban, youth-older persons and gender digital divides

Despite progress, we regret that fundamental issues related to the protection of the human rights of LGBTIQI people, the importance of technology for expanding access to comprehensive sexuality education, and the interlinkages between digital transformation and climate change were left out of the document.

We deplore the coordinated pushback from regressive governments against the advancement of the gender equality agenda witnessed in this year's negotiations, attempting to roll back long standing agreements in the context of CSW. A number of

Member States and anti-rights civil society actors continue to disrupt constructive and plural dialogue with attacks on previously agreed human rights language and are opposed to truly advancing a gender equality agenda.

This year we also saw anti-rights actors infringe on many side and parallel events, using discriminatory language and disruptive tactics in an attempt to co-opt, distort, and undermine women's, girls' and gender diverse people's rights. We are particularly outraged by the intensified anti-trans rhetoric and mobilization. As a feminist movement we stand with all women in all their diversity, including trans, intersex and non-binary, and we remain deeply committed to fighting this worldview that is based on inequality and denying rights. As attacks to gender equality, and specifically to queer and trans persons, continue in multilateral spaces, the WRC is proud to not only be an ally, but to lead together with the LGBTI Caucus an intersectional and inclusive approach to multilateral participation.

The WRC is also concerned about increasing challenges to civil society participation in the CSW and other UN spaces, including difficulties with processing and approval of non-immigration visas for those attending CSW in person, especially for those coming from marginalized groups and Global South countries. Civil society represents communities on the ground and is a crucial resource of information, expertise, as well as a watchdog, keeping states accountable for their human rights commitments. We therefore call on all actors involved, and in particular the host country, the United States of America, to adequately address this question for next year's CSW and all gender equality events held in the United Nations Headquarters.

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