



## Opening session: intervention

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Thank you honourable chair.

My name is İlayda Eskitaşçıoğlu and I am a 26 year old lawyer and a PhD student at Koç University in İstanbul researching International Human Rights Law. I am also a member of the Beijing+25 Global Youth Task Force, and today I am speaking on behalf of the Women's Major Group.

This opening speech has been prepared collectively with other young feminists like myself, and informed by more than 410 civil society members from 45 countries in the region.

I am grateful that they have given me, a young feminist, the floor to deliver this message. I was a 2 year-old baby when the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action was adopted, yet it continues to be the most progressive blueprint for achieving gender equality and advancing the rights of all women to date. However, almost 25 years have passed and we are still miles away from fully realizing the commitments made in 1995.

In fact, we face critical challenges today that threaten to roll-back the many achievements we have gained and continue to live in a world in which patriarchy, sexism, capitalism, ageism, racism, heteronormativity, and xenophobia drive women's oppression and inequality. We face a climate crisis that, if not dealt with right now, will leave us all with no future to speak of.

Having said this I would like to share with you some of the key messages that we retained from the Civil Society Forum that took place yesterday. (28 October 2019)

## **MESSAGES FROM THE THEMATIC WORKING GROUPS**

The core messages of the thematic working groups can be divided into three main categories: 1. Inclusion, 2. Emerging and Structural Problems and 3. Areas that need focus and the way forward in Beijing +25 process. They are as follows:

### **1. Inclusion**

The cross-cutting themes in all working groups representing disadvantaged, marginalized, and vulnerable groups of women were: 1. The lack of disaggregated data focusing on intersectional identities, 2. More female inclusion and participation in politics and decision-making, 3. More funding and concrete steps for the implementation of legislative frameworks. Having mentioned these cross-cutting recommendations, we can now move on to specific recommendations for each group.

Let's start with the importance of engaging young feminists.

#### **Engaging Young Feminists**

Youth activists clearly face barriers in regards to accessing to international platforms and spaces like this very room. In order to facilitate this, more direct funding to youth led organizations is needed. We demand structural changes and suggest 30 percent involvement of young feminists under 30 in decision making processes, and a transition from hierarchical to horizontal structures to foster more collaborations and co-creation. It is important to build digital infrastructure for better networking and connection with grassroots youth organizations who may not be able to travel.

#### **Rights of Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex (LBTI) and Gender Non-conforming (GNC) Women and People**

Concerning the rights of LBTI and gender non-conforming women and people, it is vital to repeal laws and policies which directly or indirectly criminalize people based on their real or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity and/or expression. Furthermore, legislation and policies which explicitly protect LBTI and GNC women and people from discrimination and violence must be enacted, which include access to employment, education, housing, healthcare, and other social services. In addition, States must provide access to legal gender recognition on the basis of self-determination and ban all non-consensual, harmful, and medically unnecessary surgeries on intersex children.

#### **Rights of Women with Disabilities**

Developing effective measures to mainstream the rights of women and girls with disabilities in policies, programs and measures, is the key, this must involve women and girls with disabilities in the development and implementation of such policies and programs. Further,

the Council of Europe's Convention on preventing violence against women and girls with disabilities must be ratified by all States. The commitments that have been set in the CRPD must be upheld, including the Optional Protocol and General Comment 3 on women and girls with disabilities.

### **Rights of Migrant Women**

For the rights of migrant women, we recommend strict measures and penalties against racial profiling, to fight against institutional and structural racism. Safety from gender based violence in dangerous migration routes and detention centers must be ensured. Residential citizenships should be given to all children of migrant women after arrival, and migrant women who report abuse in their informal work environments should be protected from deportation and sanctions.

### **Rights of Indigenous and Roma People**

To achieve gender equality we must recognize Indigenous, Roma and Sami women's rights and the importance of their voices that have been historically silenced. Specific funding, time and spaces are needed to support this community and its advocates, as well as in the provision and funding of public services and social protection systems. Financial, practical, social, and policy barriers, which include racism and lack of health insurance and identity documents, must be removed in their access to sexual and reproductive health care.

### **Rural Women and Economic Empowerment**

Young rural women are the future, they are in the intersection of gender equality, food security, and sustainable development. We need to tackle the isolation problem of rural women, listen to rural women, ensure their safety, health and education, invest in their existence, strengthen rural-urban communication, and protect their right to financial inclusion, to land, property, and productive and natural resources.

### **Rights of Widows**

The rights of widows are a critically neglected human rights issue. The numbers of widows are increasing exponentially in the region due to conflict, migration, natural disasters, harmful traditional practices, and longer life spans. Widows' rights to inheritance, land and property must be enshrined and enforced in law, and legal documentation, resources, and special attention to their access to services is urgent. Widows are of all ages and include young refugee women.

### **Rights of Older Women**

Older women routinely have their rights and needs denied due to ageism, stigma, poverty, and violence perpetrated against them. Recognition of their economic and social contributions is essential. Resources must be committed to ensuring their economic security, safety, and dignity. Furthermore, intergenerational solidarity must be affirmed as the bedrock

of all age-inclusive policy planning and service delivery to improve the lives and dignity of people of all ages, and to ensure that older women are seen as rights holders with equal entitlements. Inadequate data for women over age 49 is a key driver of the denial of older women's rights, therefore disaggregated data by age, gender and disability with five-year intervals over age 49 until death, is needed, and must inform all policies.

## **2. Emerging problems and structural challenges**

### **Addressing Anti-women's Rights Groups, Shrinking Spaces, Neo-conservatism and Women Human Rights Defenders**

One of the most critical issues we face as women's rights activists, is how to respond to the increasing effects of anti-rights agendas, shrinking space for civil society, and systematic attacks on human rights, in general, and women's and marginalized groups' rights in particular, driven by neo-conservative governments, the private sector, and well resourced and globally well connected fundamentalist faith based organisations. We are calling on governments and intergovernmental bodies to renew their gender equality commitments (such as calling the EU to ratify the Istanbul Convention), to reaffirm the principle of non-regression, and increase accountability among international organizations and governments contributing to transparency, ensuring human and women's rights, and reducing implementation gaps and impunity. Furthermore, all economic policies must be aligned with international human rights law, women's rights frameworks, and in promoting the rights of those traditionally marginalised.

### **Climate, Environment and Women's Rights**

The climate crisis is having devastating impacts on the rights of women on the frontlines, in particular rural and indigenous women, whose needs and participation must be prioritized in national climate programs and in climate funding to achieve the Paris Agreement. Governments must divest from extractive and fossil fuel sectors and invest in sustainable local sectors that have committed to gender equality, set and fulfill targets for women's participation and leadership in sustainable energy and climate policy decision-making and climate actions, and protect environmental and climate defenders who suffer from violence and harassment due to their gender.

### **Structural Economic Barriers**

In order to overcome structural problems, especially economic barriers, we need to disrupt and redefine what we value and how. We call for a complete overhaul of the current economic system, moving away from extractive and profit-driven capitalism. We need to move towards a care economy focused on people and planet and create measures that value social progress, recognizes unpaid care work as "work" that gives right to social protection, connects social protection and taxing systems to individual rights, and addresses gender based violence at work.

## **Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)**

There are many dimensions to violence against women and girls. Deeply ingrained patriarchal structures reinforce harmful gender stereotypes and violate women's rights to bodily integrity and autonomy. The main recommendations focus on improving access to justice and removing barriers to reporting. We also call for national action plans on violence against women based on gender equality, gender mainstreaming and budgeting, including steps for prevention through education and awareness, starting from pre-school age. Faster investigation and prosecution processes, better coordination among state agencies in cases of emergency, preventing impunity of perpetrators yet also rehabilitating them with a purpose of transforming toxic masculinity, multisectoral teams of well-trained health staff are important. Governments must focus on implementing policies to combat all forms of gender based violence, domestic violence, cyber violence, femicide, female genital mutilation, human trafficking and other harmful practices.

The ratification and implementation of existing comprehensive international legal frameworks such as the Istanbul Convention, and International Labor Organization Convention No. 190, adoption of domestic non-discrimination legislations, preparing comprehensive national action plans on violence against women and gender equality, trainings and awareness-raising including men and boys, the adoption of an intersectional approach, ensuring confidentiality of the proceedings, and addressing the data gap on violence against women are crucial.

Human trafficking, as a subsection of violence against women in the Beijing Platform for Action, remains a prevailing issue within the region. Governments must take the appropriate measures to guarantee the support and protection of victims of trafficking, including trafficking for the purpose of exploitation of prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, and trafficking for the purpose of forced labour, as well as address torture by non-state actors. Besides protection, governments need to focus on prevention and prosecution.

## **Women's Political Participation**

Women's political participation can be ensured through two areas: promotion and protection. States must introduce, where not present, and implement in full, affirmative measures in legislation and regulations (also within political parties) to ensure parity and equal participation of women at all levels of decision making. These measures must include sanctions for non-compliance. Importantly, women and girls active in political life must be protected against all forms of violence, abuse, and sexism.

## **Tax Justice**

As for tax justice, we need to raise tax revenues through progressive taxes with a bottom up perspective to redistribute wealth and power which would automatically contribute to gender equality. We also need better, comprehensive macro policies to tackle tax evasion and tax avoidance to establish financial justice.

## **Women in the Media**

Regarding women in the media, comprehensive legislations, regulations, and mechanisms (not only by States but also through codes of conducts by multinational media corporations) are needed to promote gender balance in media decision-making at all levels, and to tackle online harassment, gender bias and implicit discrimination in Artificial Intelligence, algorithms, and Automated Decision-Making, as well as to combat the impunity of social media corporations and advertisement sectors. We need to ensure digital and media literacy for all, so that women can use digital media as an educational tool and to transition from passive consumers to active content creators.

# **3. Areas that need more focus & how to pave the way forward in the Beijing+25 process**

## **Accountability and Monitoring**

There is a need for substantive protection frameworks (with enforcement authority) and resources to reduce the obstacles and risks women and women's NGOs face due to increasing governmental threats, violence, and structural inequalities. Existing accountability bodies are not responsive to women's human rights, and women and women's NGOs all around the world do not have a truly 'Independent Body' that they can appeal to, expect fair decisions from and interventions for improvements of their lives. We need a Global Independent Women's Body to which women can appeal to without any barriers, which has independent investigative, decision making, and enforcement powers, to demand accountability and reparations from those that commit gender based crimes.

## **Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights**

Growing opposition or roll-back to sexual and reproductive rights is of grave concern in the region, fueled by the harmful gender norms, stereotypes, assumptions and stigma that undermine women's sexual and reproductive health and rights. States must mainstream mandatory, age-responsive, standardised, evidence-based and scientifically accurate comprehensive sexuality education curricula across the education system including into ordinary school curricula. Abortion laws must be brought into line with human rights standards making them safe and legal. All barriers to accessing sexual reproductive health services for women, including legal status, migrant status, among others, must be removed, and women must be freed from all stigma and discrimination related to their choices around

their sexuality and respected for exercising their right to bodily autonomy. Moreover, States must provide a full range of health services to all women, including those who are sex workers, that are confidential, non-conditional, free from violence, stigma and discrimination, and that respond to and recognize their diverse identities, experiences, working conditions, and needs.

### **Peace and Security and Displaced Women**

Regarding peace, security and displaced women, we need to clarify that peace is not possible without meaningful and equal participation of women, CSOs, displaced groups, and former combatants. We demand the expansion of the definition of security to include and focus on human security, with categories such as environmental and food security, political security, community and personal security. We also demand effective systems of early warning, conflict prevention, mitigation, and security for those who promote the peace agenda in their countries and communities.

### **Women Labour Movements**

Regarding Trade unions and women's labour movements, the ILO Convention 190 and accompanying Recommendation 106 on violence and harassment at the workplace must be ratified urgently, with a particular focus on sectors which are more exposed to violence against women such as care, domestic work, media, and informal work. Over-representation of women in precarious employment, low wage employment, and the informal economy must be addressed by ensuring universal access to a living wage and social protection, a global care crisis must be averted by committing a minimum of 2% of income to public care services.

### **Education, Knowledge Transfer and Access to Technologies**

We call on governments to ensure free quality education that is well resourced and accessible for all throughout early childhood to further, higher, technical, and vocational education. It is important to have an educational paradigm which focuses on global citizenship, that is inclusive of peace and reconciliation, human rights, trauma-informed education, community development processes, and includes comprehensive sexuality education..

### **Financing for Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action**

In order to move forward in Beijing +25 and the implementation of BPfA, we need more than speeches and commitments, we need financing. Legal reforms should be enacted to ensure obligatory, transparent, and accountable budget allocations for the effective implementation of commitments on women's rights and gender equality, supported by monitoring and gender-segregated financial data.

## **Corporate and Institutional Accountability to the Beijing+25 Process**

A core part of the way forward in the Beijing +25 process is corporate and institutional accountability. UN Women should actively hold corporations accountable for gender equality issues and the gendered impact of their operations. The collective efforts and negotiations for the draft UN binding treaty on business and human rights should accelerate, with a focus on gender-impact assessment and due diligence, gender-sensitive remedies and justice mechanisms, and creating an enabling environment for women human rights defenders.

### **MESSAGES FROM THE REGIONAL WORKING GROUPS**

We had 48 countries represented in our CSO Forum. Each sub-region has its own history, reality, advances and barriers, and each sent important recommendations for the development of women's rights as a whole in the region.

Firstly, recommendations from **Central Asia and Russia** focus on the need for States to provide mechanisms to regulate growing religious fundamentalism, to review domestic legislations on violence against women, including on domestic violence, with an effort to harmonize laws and policies with international standards, to involve more women in peacebuilding in accordance with the SC Resolution 1325, and to ensure women's access to economic, educational, and natural resources, mainly, to land and water.

The urgent message from the **Caucasus** region includes the need to modify social and cultural practices to combat gender stereotypes, for States to enact legal frameworks for full implementation of the Istanbul Convention, and to ensure comprehensive, mandatory, sexual and reproductive rights education in school curricula.

Recommendations for **Eastern Europe** focused on the biggest barriers undermining gender equality progress, which are: political instability, military conflicts which disproportionately affect women and girls, gender dimensions not being integrated in all development policies, and the underfinancing of gender equality implementation. As a priority, we demand implementing gender-based budgeting, elimination of gender-based discrimination and violence, an increase in sexual and reproductive rights budget, and ensuring the inclusion of all women in peacebuilding processes.

Demands for **Western and Central Europe** include that States employ effective measures to prevent and eliminate all forms of gender-based violence, with immediate ratification and implementation of the Istanbul Convention, focusing on intersectional forms of discrimination and cyber violence. We call for the adoption and implementation of a robust political strategy to achieve gender equality in line with obligations under CEDAW and the commitments of the 2030 Agenda, with ambitious goals, targets and benchmarks, strong institutional mechanisms and resources, which are subject to regular monitoring.

Demands for **North Americas, Israel and Palestine** call on States to develop National Action Plans to eliminate gender-based violence, recognising the systemic violence towards



marginalised and historically discriminated communities, including indigenous women, women of colour, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex and gender non-conforming women and people and other vulnerable minorities.

We call on governments from **Western Balkans and Turkey** to learn from the women's movement about local and regional cooperation, gender transformative participation, and women's economic empowerment. Women should participate in politics, peace building and reconciliation, as equal citizens, grounded in constitutional guarantees.

## Conclusion

All in all, we have hope, we have anger, and we call for immediate action! We are encouraged by the mobilization and enthusiasm of young people, and are inspired by new and progressive developments, despite concerns for roll-back on sexual and reproductive health and rights all over the world.

We are dismayed by the worldwide trend of anti-women and anti-gender equality discourse and actions, and the pushback we are receiving, not only from populist governments, but also from many other sections of society. Our space is shrinking, yet we need to push back against the pushback.

We are calling on you to put considerable time, effort, and funding into implementing the commitments that you have made as States. Let's walk the talk.

As you move on with the sessions today, please pay attention to, and keep in mind, these core messages from civil society representatives. They are the heart and soul of the fight for gender equality.

*Thank you very much.*