Moving from Rhetoric towards Real Inclusion of Gender Equality and Women’s Human Rights in the Sustainable Development & Post 2015 Development Agenda

The Women’s Major Group (WMG) on Sustainable Development Responds to the Special Event convened by the President of the General Assembly to review progress towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, and to chart the way forward.

The Women’s Major Group\(^1\) acknowledges Member States for the sense of urgency and determination shown in the outcome document, as both the final push for the MDGs and as a significant input for the future post-2015 development agenda. However, we are greatly concerned that without a transformative shift in the way that gender equality and women’s human rights and justice concerns are articulated, a truly sustainable Post2015 Development agenda will not be achieved.

As we have already conveyed to the Secretary General, we ask for a “stand-alone gender equality and women’s human rights goal” in the post 2015 development agenda, as well as having gender equality as a cross-cutting priority in all dimensions of sustainable development.

Urgent action of our key concerns are needed as follows:

- **Adopting a Human rights framework**: While we appreciate the references to the importance of a human rights framework for the new development agenda, we feel that this must go further. The new global development paradigm must be rights-based, holistic, inclusive, just and gender-just, equitable and universal.

- **Aiming at eradicating poverty through promoting social inclusion and social justice**, addressing rising inequalities and women’s human rights, including respecting, protecting and fulfilling sexual and reproductive rights, with special attention to ensuring access to quality and universal sexual and reproductive health education, information and services.

- **Make the links among various multilateral processes** taking place. These processes include: the acceleration of the MDGs, the evolution of the Sustainable Development Goals, climate change negotiations, population and development negotiations (ICPD), financing for

\(^1\) The Women’s Major Group (WMG) coordinates the input and participation of Women and Feminist organisations in the United Nations processes on Sustainable Development Goals and the Post-2015 development agenda. The WMG was created as one of nine Major Groups in the outcome agreement of the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro. This statement was prepared by members of the WMG in particular Elisabeth van der Steenhoven (WO=MEN, Netherlands), Deniz Keynak of Women for Women’s Human Rights (Turkey) and Noelene Nabulivou of Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (Fiji) see [http://www.womenrio20.org](http://www.womenrio20.org)
development, and ensure attention to means of implementation externally such as through the discussions on trade and finance within the World Trade Organization, G20 and G8.

- **Financing and Means of Implementation:** We are concerned at the lack of text in the Outcome document on concrete financing mechanisms and means of implementation, both for acceleration of achieving the MDGs, and also for the Post 2015 Sustainable Development agenda. We therefore call for explicit attention to monitoring and accountability frameworks and recognition of the need to address systemic global development systems, including restructuring the global financial system through transformation of the International Financial Institutions, combating tax dodging and tax evasions, complying with ODA levels of 0.7% of GDP, using a Financial Transaction Tax for development purposes, among others.

- **Meaningful Participation and involvement of civil society:** Finally, we call for a meaningful, inclusive and transparent intergovernmental process with full engagement of civil society and social movements, including participation of diverse women’s movements, feminists and gender justice activists, especially those from the economic south, at all stages of negotiations.

- The Millennium Development Goals have not been reached and goals 3 and 5 are especially off track. A final push is urgently needed and priority should be placed on achieving gender equality, women’s human rights, and sexual and reproductive health and rights.

1. **On the call for a human rights framework**
   While we recognize the references made in the narrative and in some official delegates speeches during the Special Event, the work to accelerate MDGs needs to be based on the specific and already agreed upon international human rights instruments and mechanisms. This includes implementation of already agreed upon international agreements such as the 1993 Vienna Human Rights Declaration and Program of Action; the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW); the ICPD Programme of Action (ICPD PoA) and the Key Actions (ICPD+5), the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA); the 2001 World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance Declaration and Programme of Action; the 2007 Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples; and the 2006 Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

2. **On achieving gender equality and women’s empowerment**
   The achievement of gender equality and women’s empowerment should be at the heart of the development agenda. As we have already conveyed to the Secretary General, we ask for a “stand-alone goal on gender equality and women’s human rights” in the post 2015 development agenda, as well as gender equality as a cross cutting issue in all dimensions of sustainable development, including clear and transformative targets, sufficient allocated resources and robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.

3. **On participation and principles**
   The post-2015 process and the SDGs should be built on internationally agreed development and environmental sustainability goals, all Rio principles including the precautionary principle and the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities, existing national, regional and global accountability mechanisms within the UN human rights system. By the same token it should ensure meaningful, consistent and systematic participation of CSOs and youth from the South, particularly those women and girls living in poverty.

4. **On sustainability**
   Ensuring intergenerational equity is imperative. It requires engaging women and men fully in formulating right-based, ecosystem-based, gender-responsive and socially just solutions to halt
biodiversity loss and climate change, which stand as symbols of a global focus on short-term gains and unsustainable consumption and production patterns, and impede poverty eradication.

5. **On economic models**

A sustainable and equitable economy, accepting the limits of growth and consumerism is crucial. Transforming the current development model, reformulating the economic model and indicators to reflect value on people and women’s unpaid care work and planet is crucial. It thus challenges the current economic patriarchal, unsustainable and extractivist model of development. This also means ensuring equal access to full and decent employment and bidding human rights based regulatory mechanisms to keep private sector and businesses accountability. This also means recognizing and learning from alternative visions of development that put people and the planet’s well-being at the center. One of the most significant macro-economic alternatives would be just and progressive tax systems, which favour the poor over corporations and where the resources earned from taxes are spent on public services.

6. **On education**

While education receives some prominence, there needs to be a firmer commitment to ensuring education as fundamental human right, and recognition that education is an indispensable requirement for realizing other human rights and a tool to a country’s economic growth and for achieving gender equality and human rights. Further attention should be given to the underlying socio-economic, cultural and political causes for low enrolment and completion rates among girls, and implement comprehensive education on human sexuality programs in and out of schools that give children and young people the life skills they need to understand their bodies and their rights.

7. **On security**

The women, peace and security agenda should be a core concern and highlighted in the post-2015 agenda. Achieving gender equality and women’s human rights including to full and equal participation in decision-making, including during peace processes, is intrinsic to peace and security and sustainable development. This implies full implementation of Resolution 1325 and an alternative approach to conflict affected areas, focusing on the root causes of conflict and human security, sexual harassment in the workplace and violence against women.

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**We call for prioritization of:**

1) **Women’s economic autonomy and gender justice:** not only stopping the feminization of poverty or working to eradicate poverty, but transforming macroeconomic structures, restructuring the global financial architecture, taking into account and redistributing women’s unpaid care work, changing role-models, building equality and social justice and ensuring that women have access to and control of economic resources.

2) **Women’s political autonomy and full citizenship:** working for parity of participation at all levels, and ensuring women’s participation across the broad spectrum of formal and informal decision-making institutions and not limited to quota systems; further
ensuring that participation is central to building democracy and ensuring women’s full citizenship and fundamental human rights.

3) **Women’s freedom from all forms of violence:** whether perpetuated by state-sponsored actors, private actors or by family members, violence remains one of the most pervasive barriers to women’s full enjoyment of their human rights. Any effective intervention needs to address violence against women and accelerate its full eradication.

4) **Women’s sexual autonomy and gender equality:** women must have the freedom to express their sexuality free from violence, coercion and discrimination. Women should have access to universal and equitable sexual and reproductive health education, information and services and to receive social support without stigma or discrimination.

5) **Access to sexual and reproductive health and rights:** without the ability and freedom to control their bodies, lives and sexuality, the full range of women’s human rights cannot be achieved. Ensuring sexual and reproductive health and rights must be explicit aims in the Post 2015 sustainable development framework.