



## Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General  
23 November 2019

English only

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### Commission on the Status of Women

Sixty-fourth session

9–20 March 2020

Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”

### Statement submitted by Amnesty International, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council\*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

Amnesty International welcomes the opportunity to review the progress made in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action 25 years after its adoption. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action remains the most comprehensive governmental agreement to date on what needs to be done to achieve women's empowerment and gender equality. It reaffirms the fundamental principles set forth in earlier human rights instruments that women's rights are an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights.

The twenty fifth anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action coincides with the seventy fifth anniversary of the United Nations and twentieth anniversary of Security Council resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. It also happens against the backdrop of a growing backlash against gender equality, women's empowerment and human rights, shrinking civil society spaces and increasing attacks on women human rights defenders, unfolding climate crisis and a number of intense armed conflicts where gender-based violence and other human rights violations are committed against women and girls every day.

At the sixty fourth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, the international community must engage in a comprehensive assessment of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action's progress so far and commitments made at its previous reviews. States must recommit to addressing gaps and challenges in implementation and redouble their efforts to achieve gender justice and human rights for all women and girls worldwide, including through the implementation of 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the women, peace and security agenda.

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action sets objectives in 12 critical areas of concern where governments must put efforts to effect concrete changes to advance the goals of equality, development and peace for all women and girls everywhere. However, despite the progress in some areas, its comprehensive agenda of gender equality in all spheres of life remains unfinished and even challenged in some respects.

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action affirms that, "the human rights of women include their right to have control over and decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their sexuality, including sexual and reproductive health, free of coercion, discrimination and violence". However, women and girls continue to be denied their sexual and reproductive rights, and at the United Nations level some states are attempting to weaken and undermine previously agreed standards on sexual and reproductive health and rights. Governments must uphold women and girls' rights to make free decisions about their sexuality and reproductive lives, and to enjoy the highest attainable standard of health. States must abolish laws that criminalize the exercise of sexual and reproductive rights and, as part of the universal health coverage, ensure available, accessible, affordable and quality, comprehensive and confidential sexual and reproductive health information, goods and services, including safe and legal abortion, and evidence-based sexuality education. Women and girls must be enabled to participate in the formulation of policies affecting their sexual and reproductive rights and have access to justice and redress when these rights are violated.

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action reaffirms States' obligation to prevent and investigate all forms of violence against women and girls perpetrated by State or non-State actors, and to eliminate, "harmful traditional or customary practices, cultural prejudices and extremism" and violence resulting from them. States must implement effective measures to protect women from violence and harmful practices, and ensure that all acts of gender-based violence are investigated

and prosecuted in an effective, timely and thorough manner; reparations and compensation are provided as appropriate; survivors of gender-based violence are treated fairly and not further traumatized by the justice system, and that they receive appropriate support services.

States must refrain from invoking, “any custom, tradition or religious consideration”, to avoid their obligations to combat gender-based violence and discrimination and eradicate harmful gender stereotypes. Governments must also resist any attempts to water down language on gender and women’s rights under the guise of references to, “traditional values”, “protection of the family” or “culture”, which threaten to undermine existing commitments in legally binding human rights documents.

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action recognizes that, “peace is inextricably linked with equality between women and men and development”, and requires governments to protect the rights of women living in situations of armed and other conflicts or under foreign occupation. Over the past decades, there have been significant achievements, such as the adoption of Security Council resolution on women, peace and security, the appointment of the Secretary-General’s Special Representative on sexual violence in conflict, and the establishment of international criminal tribunals and the International Criminal Court.

However, States must increase efforts to prevent violations and protect women’s rights in conflict and post-conflict situations by fully implementing the Security Council resolution 1325 and related resolutions. Women’s full and effective participation in peace-making and peace-building processes is crucial in breaking the cycles of violence and discrimination. Women are key in creating peaceful societies and in enabling sustainable development. States must guarantee accountability for gender-based violence crimes in armed conflict, and ensure access to justice, truth, reparation and comprehensive healthcare service, including safe abortion, for survivors.

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action requires States to take measures to ensure women’s equal participation in public and political life. Crucial to this is the protection and promotion of women human rights defenders who frequently face violence, harassment and intimidation, especially when they challenge existing power relations and gender stereotypes. An increasing number of States around the world are shrinking civil society space by imposing legal and administrative restrictions on freedom of movement, expression, association and peaceful assembly, which often target women human rights defenders who defend gender equality and rights that are increasingly contested.

States have international obligations to ensure protection of human rights defenders and their activities, as articulated in the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders adopted in 1998 and reaffirmed in General Assembly resolution [68/181](#) focusing on women human rights defenders. States must recognize that women human rights defenders key role in promoting and defending the rights of women and girls, including those facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination. States must create an environment conducive for defenders to carry out their important work free from gender-based harassment, intimidation and violence by State and non-State actors.

Lack of adequate and effective financing has consistently been identified as one of the biggest impediments to closing gender gaps and achieving gender equality. In the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, States committed to, “work for a significant increase in investments to close the gender gap and strengthen support for institutions in relation to gender equality”. This commitment is reflected in the inclusion of an indicator on gender responsive budgeting amongst the Sustainable

Development Goals indicators, seeking to measure the, “proportion of countries with systems to track and make public allocations for gender equality and women’s empowerment”.

States must implement the commitments for increasing financing for gender equality in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by introducing mechanisms for tracking and making public allocations for gender equality; ensuring fair and progressive tax systems; and adequately resourcing national policies, strategies and plans on gender equality across all sectors of public expenditure. States must also invest in social infrastructure and essential services that reduce and redistribute women’s unpaid care and domestic work, and ensure that global trade, financial and investment agreements are conducive to the promotion of gender.

The climate crisis is among the biggest global challenges of all times. It threatens the enjoyment of human rights and exacerbates gender inequality and other forms of discrimination. People most vulnerable to the impacts of the climate crisis are frequently those whose human rights are less well protected. Women and girls are disproportionately affected by the climate crisis due to pre-existing gender discrimination, while climate crisis-related harms exacerbate pre-existing gender inequality. States must embrace solutions to the climate crisis that are based on the full protection and realisation of all human rights, including women’s rights and gender equality. States must commit to working together in the spirit of multilateralism and international cooperation to urgently avert a humanitarian and human rights crisis on an unthinkable scale.

It is crucial that the sixty fourth session of the Commission on the Status of Women concludes with a strong outcome that reaffirms governments’ commitment to further addressing the challenges to gender equality and women’s empowerment and taking concrete action to ensure that these commitments are maintained and strengthened in the implementation of 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and women, peace and security agenda, in line with States’ international legal obligations to protect and promote women and girls’ human rights.

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