

## **Joint Statement to Promote a Global Development Strategy based on Human Rights submitted to the United Nations 58<sup>th</sup> Session of the Commission on the Status of Women**

The Center for Women's Global Leadership (CWGL) at Rutgers University and women's and human rights organizations dedicated to gender equity and women's empowerment, welcome the 58<sup>th</sup> session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) and States consideration of the priority theme on: "the challenges and achievements in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for Women and Girls" and the review theme: "access and participation of women and girls to education, transportation, science and technology, including equal access to full employment and decent work and the global development agenda."

For many years we have worked to develop and facilitate women's leadership for women's human rights and social justice worldwide, calling attention to the critical importance of working toward the full realization of women's rights - economic, social and cultural, and political and civil. Collectively and individually, we have worked to call on governments and all other development actors to utilize international human rights to provide a clear and universally recognized framework in the design, implementation, and monitoring of economic policies and programs.

Development is a gendered process that affects women and men differently. A human rights framework offers a method to access the development strategies relevant for women and girls that are specifically addressed by the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs): primary education, gender equality and women's empowerment, maternal health, and decent work.

The world has dramatically changed since the MDGs were created. The global financial crisis of 2008 has wreaked havoc on livelihoods. The promotion of austerity policies to deal with the consequent increases in government budget deficits has led to the erosion of economic and social rights for both developing and developed countries alike. Although large reductions in extreme poverty have occurred since the MDGs were enacted, food vulnerability can be seen in both developed and developing countries. For example in 2008, 24% of people in developing countries were still extremely poor, living on less than \$1.25 a day. As a result of the crisis, in some developed countries, low income families are increasingly dependent on food banks and other food assistance strategies each month in order to survive. The failure of key governments to implement adequate regulation of financial markets and institutions during the three decades leading up to the crisis is a failure to meet the human rights obligation of the state to protect rights from the actions of third parties that might threaten those rights.

Inequality within and between countries has increased, and women continue to face highly unequal outcomes across the globe. Unemployment and underemployment have increased and put further downward pressure on working conditions and benefits, and shrinking wages and rising costs of living have pushed the achievement of gender equality and women's empowerment called for in the MDGs further into the distance. In fact, more women in the workplace has not necessarily meant better working conditions and pay, but more exploitation and vulnerability. Women make up a large percentage of workers forced to migrate within their own countries or to other countries in search of a livable wage while at the same time opening themselves up to possibilities of violence and discrimination. Higher and more volatile food prices created by unchecked speculation in international commodity markets undermine women's living standards and incomes as producers of primary products increasing the risk of hunger and women's abilities to care for their families.

The MDG framers could not foresee these realities. The crisis demonstrates that the action or lack of action, by one country can affect the realization of rights elsewhere. The critical importance of a global partnership for development articulated in Goal 8 takes on new significance in the light of current global economic realities. The pivotal role that the macroeconomic environment plays in realizing social goals and objectives is clearer than ever before and must be taken into account and incorporated as part of a coherent development strategy in the future. The realization of human rights for all people in all countries is impossible without an enabling global economic environment committed to the realization of economic and social rights.

International human rights covenants and conventions, and the Declarations and Programs of Action on Human Rights, Population and Development, Social Development, Equality Development and Peace provide principles for setting benchmarks for assessing the extent to which people are deprived of their rights, and benchmarks for assessing the extent to which policy has been conducted in ways to realize rights.

We call on member states to implement their agreed conclusions, respect international human rights law and agreements, and commit to the principles and goals within them.

Specifically, we strongly urge member states to:

#### Take a Human Rights Approach

- Enhance recognition of State obligations to respect, protect, and fulfill human rights, and to commit to the principles of: progressive realization, maximum available resources, non-retrogression, minimum essential levels/minimum core obligations, and non-discrimination and equality.
- Create clear regulations to ensure economic interests and conditions do not undermine respect for human rights and sustainable development.

#### On gender equality – linking goals to women’s complex realities

- Address both the public and private sphere of women’s lives, including use of ‘temporary special measures’ to address a history of disadvantage – measure opportunity of outcomes not just opportunity, with a particular attention to women’s unpaid work.
- Measures to promote women’s empowerment in the labor market must look to enforcement of labor rights, the quality of employment and the volatility of earnings.
- Expand assessment of realization of women’s reproductive rights and freedom from violence because of their linkage to maternal mortality and women’s health.
- Develop tools to address the new forms of racism, nationalism, sexism and xenophobia arising in all countries and leading to new forms of retrenchments as a result of economic crisis and that threaten achievement of social and economic rights.
- Expand assessment tools for gender equality and empowerment to take into account the intersection of gender with other forms of disadvantage, such as race, class, ethnicity, and sexuality.

#### On macro level policies – envisioning a common global enabling environment where macroeconomic policy contributes to mobilizing resources for economic and social rights fulfillment

- Fulfill the obligation to protect by the effective regulation of financial institutions and markets to prevent economic crises.
- Evaluate macroeconomic policy with regard to the principle of nondiscrimination and equality to eliminate gender bias.
- Integrate unpaid care work and social reproduction into the formulation and evaluation of macroeconomic policies.
- Avoid macroeconomic policies that exacerbate inequalities along the lines of socio-economic status, race, caste, and ethnicity.

#### On national level monitoring and accountability for developing and developed countries – utilizing established human rights covenants and conventions criteria in evaluation

- Secure robust evaluations and comparisons with other countries taking into account diverse economic structures.
- Consider the incorporation of the Maastricht Principles on Extraterritorial Obligations in the area of economic, social and cultural rights which outline State obligations relating to acts and omissions (administrative, legislative, adjudicatory and other measures) that have effects on the enjoyment of human rights outside that State’s territory.
- Assessment of development policies to look beyond individual strategies (poverty alleviation, health and wellbeing) to macroeconomic frameworks that together influence the success of individual programs: (1)

government expenditure; (2) government revenue; (3) development assistance (both social development assistance and private resource flows); (4) debt and deficit financing; and (5) monetary policy and financial regulation.

- Encourage the development of different strategies for different national and local realities in order to address global imbalances and inequalities in access and opportunity.
- Evaluate trade agreements – multilateral, bilateral, and regional – with regard to their impacts on economic and social rights.
- Multinational corporations, credit rating agencies, and international banks as important actors in the global economic environment must be held accountable for the realization of human rights.

We call on the CSW to facilitate leadership to support States in fulfilling their human rights obligations. We remain committed to working with the United Nations in building a world where the human rights of all are fully realized.

*Statement adapted from:*

Balakrishnan, Radhika, Diane Elson and James Heintz. (eds). 2013. [\*The Integration of Gender and Human Rights into the Post-2015 Development Framework\*](#), Center for Women's Global Leadership.

Balakrishnan, Radhika and Diane Elson. 2012. [\*The Post-2015 Development Framework and the Realization of Women's Rights and Social Justice\*](#). Center for Women's Global Leadership.