

**61<sup>th</sup> Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women  
National Women's Alliances Submission re Australia's Position on the Priority Theme  
Women's Economic Empowerment in the Changing World of Work**

**General**

1. We welcome the increasing focus on the SDGs as a site for action on gender equality but that note that it creates a risk that those facets of gender equality, women's and girls' human rights and women's and girls' empowerment which are not captured by the SDGs, and those which are not explicitly mentioned but fall broadly under the commitment to leave no one behind, such as the rights, needs and contribution of Indigenous women, women with disability, LGBTIQ women, young women and girls, older women, the Women Peace and Security Agenda, women in prison, migrant and refugee women and girls and women in the sex industry will slip off the agenda through a focus on the SDGs. *We ask that the Australian delegation promote those issues at CSW61.*
2. Women's, human rights and feminist organizations (CSOs) and academic institutions play a critical role in driving change and ensuring accountability for gender equality. Australia has advocated for the role of CSOs in the CSW in the past and we *urge Australia to strongly continue to advocate for an active, meaningful and clearly defined role of CSOs at CSW.* In particular, *we call on Australia to advocate for States to take measures to protect women human rights defenders and support and fund specialist women's services and women-led and feminist CSOs and networks.*
3. Human rights instruments and mechanisms are central to the achievement of economic security for women and their role should be specifically referenced in the Agreed Conclusions. The importance of the role of National Human Rights Institutions in the CSW process must also be articulated.

**Women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work**

4. The CSW61 priority theme of women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work raises a number of key areas, particularly the need to:
  - 4.1. ensure that women have decent work with fair and safe working conditions which protect the human rights of women and provide a functional living wage on a par with comparable male workers;
  - 4.2. address the tendency for women to be employed in insecure, casualised and short term / contract work more often than men;
  - 4.3. prevent workplace gender discrimination and discrimination on the basis of pregnancy and parenting responsibilities, along with preventing bullying and sexual harassment in the workplace including through the misuse of technology;
  - 4.4. addressing women's economic empowerment across the life cycle, particularly by recognising and valuing women's unpaid care work, promoting an equal division of unpaid work across the genders,
  - 4.5. ensure women have access to quality, affordable child care and paid maternity leave;

- 4.6. address gendered pay gaps, gendered discrimination through taxation, discriminatory or inequitable practices which result in diminished opportunities for women business owners and other structural disincentives to work;
  - 4.7. address the gender gap in retirement incomes and savings and discrimination against older women when seeking and maintaining employment;
  - 4.8. ensure responses to violence against women include actions to secure women's continuing workplace engagement, such as family / domestic violence leave recognising the disruption caused by family violence to women's lives and the unique opportunities available to workplaces to support their employees;
  - 4.9. promote the need for career advice and counselling, skills development, and access to continuing vocational (including technical) education and training to enhance opportunities for women and girls to pursue careers in a wider range of occupations;
  - 4.10. develop and implement legislation addressing economic challenges for migrant women, the protection of their labour rights and their economic empowerment by States, institutions and civil society and prevent the exploitation of women migrant and other women by labour hire companies and other entities, particularly women on short term or precarious visas or women with no permanent residency;
  - 4.11. promote the conscious inclusion of the needs and rights of Indigenous women and girls, with a strong focus on the intersectional disadvantage experienced by these women and girls, particularly through the intersections of gender, racism and the ongoing effects of colonialism;
  - 4.12. promote the conscious consideration of the needs and rights of women and girls with disability, including through additional resources required;
  - 4.13. ensure availability of sufficient gender disaggregated and gender responsive and transformative data collection;
  - 4.14. emphasise the duty of states to implement human rights-based economic legislation and policies that promote gender equality and women's rights;
  - 4.15. assess and mitigate the risk of possible backlash against women entering the workforce in increasing numbers. Economic empowerment can decrease the risk of violence by increasing women's economic and social power, but can also threaten women's safety and security if men respond with violent backlash as patriarchal systems are challenged;<sup>1</sup> and
  - 4.16. support women's organising and women's rights collective action and social movements.
5. In addition to the above, women's economic empowerment also requires a focus on the conditions which permit and support women's workplace engagement and economic participation, including:
- 5.1. supporting and promoting women's voice, agency and public participation, particularly women's substantive participation and leadership at all levels of decision-making in public life, commercial and economic activity, peace agreements and post-conflict recovery processes and within the community and household;

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<sup>1</sup>See <https://www.iwda.org.au/assets/files/Do-No-Harm-Policy-Brief-IWDA.pdf>

- 5.2. promoting gender responsive education as essential to women's and girls' economic growth and human development, including accessible lifelong and non-formal learning, financial literacy education and education about sexual and reproductive rights. Australia should promote the importance of access to quality, relevant & affordable work-related and vocational education and training, particularly given the failure of the private training market to deliver positive outcomes for women and promote the development of tailored, accessible life-long education and training for marginalised women including women with disabilities and women from migrant and Indigenous backgrounds;
  - 5.3. promoting accessible and comprehensive healthcare for women and girls across the lifespan, particularly the clear articulation and implementation of the sexual and reproductive rights of women in an environment of severe backlash against women's and girls' right to control their own bodies;
  - 5.4. stressing the importance of eliminating violence against women and girls in all its forms, including domestic and family violence and sexual assault (including marital rape), elder abuse, harmful cultural practices (including female genital mutilation and early and forced marriage), forced sterilisation, trafficking, slavery and slavery-like practices;
  - 5.5. ensuring women's access to and control over land and productive resources and access to finance and loans as critical elements in achieving women's economic agency and empowerment. Laws promoting women's full and equal access to land, property, technology, credit and other productive resources should be actively enforced;
  - 5.6. ensuring women and girls have access to safe, accessible and affordable housing;
  - 5.7. ensuring women and girls have access to enabling technologies, including telecommunications and information technologies, while also addressing technology facilitated stalking and abuse of women and girls;
  - 5.8. ensuring women have access to specialist and culturally responsive women's services, including health, housing and legal services as well as access to community controlled organisations;
  - 5.9. Ensuring women have access to justice and full legal standing before the law and that the human rights of women and girls are protected within customary legal systems;
  - 5.10. recognising families in all their diverse forms and the promotion of rights relating to sexual orientation and gender identity and expression (including the rights of lesbian, gay, intersex, transgender and bisexual people);
  - 5.11. resisting all attempts at redefinition of women's and girls' human rights that subsume these within the framework of the family and advocating for explicit language referring to women's and girls' human rights.
6. The Sustainable Development Goals have an important role to play in the promotion of women's economic empowerment by fostering collaborative partnerships between governments, the private sector and civil society to realise gender equality and create the conditions and impetus for fair, decent and non-discriminatory work practices.
  7. The implementation of the *Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing for Development* is also critical for the realisation of women's economic empowerment. Both the Sustainable Development Goals and the Financing for Development outcomes identify gender equality and

women's empowerment as key objectives in sustainable development and financing for development efforts.

8. Australia has a strong history of articulating the need to address the intersections of disadvantage, those intersecting systems of oppression being: poverty, racism and xenophobia, heterosexism and homophobia, sexism and limitations on sexual and reproductive rights, as well as the historical impacts of colonialism for Indigenous peoples. We strongly recommend that Australia continue to advocate for an analysis of the priority and review themes which addresses and explores intersectionality and promote the voices of women experiencing intersectional discrimination and disadvantage, particularly for:

- women with disability,
- Indigenous women,
- women from marginalised socio-economic, racial and ethnic groups,
- young women and girls,
- older women,
- women in remote, rural or regional areas,
- displaced, migrant and refugee women,
- lesbian, gay, intersex, transgender and bisexual people
- women in the sex industry; and
- women in prison.

The National Women's Alliances thank the Australian Government for this opportunity to provide views and look forward to working with the Australian Delegation to continue its advocacy in these areas.