

**SPECIAL ISSUE**

**MAY—OCTOBER 2013**

## **WIDE+ Workshop: “Identifying feminist opportunities and voices in times of crises” Madrid, Spain, 4 July, 2013**

Around 40 feminists from across Europe gathered in Madrid, Spain, last July 4<sup>th</sup> 2013, to reflect on the new strategies, spaces and challenges that feminists face. Five key note speeches and an open floor session gave room to an inspiring and sharp debate where the key question was: ‘what kind of strategies and action should feminist and other human rights advocates take in this changing global order?’.

*A report by Gea Meijers.*

*Rosabel Agirregomezkorta* sketched in her introduction the changing world for men and women. The context for the workshop was the multidimensional crises we are facing; in the environment, in care, in the social sphere, politics and of course in the economic system. The cause for the crises is a systemic model found in political, economic, cultural and epistemic arenas. The model is of a western speculative modernity that aims to privatize the

common goods, and deprives most of the population of their well-being, for the benefit of a privileged elite, which is often white and male. In this privatized and exploitative neo-liberal offensive territories that are essential to ensure human dignity for all, such as environmental resources and women's bodies, become battlefields. Women need to occupy, resist and defend areas and spaces in dispute because much is at stake.

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The keynote speech by *Christa Wichterich* addressed how trends of progression and backlash in the promotion and implementation of women's rights are being entangled with the neo-liberal paradigm change. The global neo-liberal transformation is greatly undermining equality, protection of human rights and the environment. The neo-liberal development also impacts the women's rights agenda negatively and it leads to questions whether more freedom to express our identities is actually a real freedom or new standards for consumers to apply to.

Christa sees a key role for feminists to keep pushing for the women's human rights agenda and to use it as our framework: *"there is no alternative but to reclaim and rearticulate the women's human rights agenda when struggling against the austerity regime and when negotiating the upcoming sustainable development goals. But most important: if we as feminists start transformative practices, reclaim commons and attempt to build economic and socio-ecological alternatives, those have to be rooted in the women's human rights agenda, in a concept of global citizenship and in deep democracy which overcomes the public-private-divide and crosses over cultural boundaries and national borders"*.

*Nines Fidalgo* showed the impact of neo-liberal policy in Spain and how social movements, especially the feminist movement, have reacted to it. The response of the Spanish government to the economic crisis has been to implement neo-liberal policies combined with gender policies that directly curtail women's rights. Notably the government is proposing a planned huge cutback in the right to abortion. While women's rights and gender equality are being attacked, feminists and other citizens' movements find new ways to reclaim their rights. In the past few years, protests in the streets have been swelling, strikes have been massive, online protests have been set up and new social movements have been formed.

Feminists in Spain have thus found new ways of resisting. This has led to new and closer collaborations between grassroots feminists and those working in the field of development cooperation. And it showed how important international solidarity is. Now Spanish feminists are being supported and receiving advice from their friends in Latin America that have been dealing for a longer period with governments pushing for neo-liberal policies. Nines suggested that it is a task for WIDE+ to promote international solidarity.

*Claudia Thallmayer* from WIDE Austria reported about the results from the CSO conference Vienna+20. She focused on the debates and outcomes in the women's chapter that is part of the CSO declaration. More than 140 persons from various CSOs around the world gathered in Vienna on 25 and 26 June 2013, on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights and its Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action. The red line throughout the CSO conference Vienna+20 was the critique on the substantial gaps in human rights protection, arising from the fact that many states still interpret their obligations as being applicable only, or primarily, within their own borders. It was pointed out that without the acceptance and implementation of extraterritorial obligations, human rights cannot be universally realized, nor can they play a substantial role in the regulation of globalization.

The collaborations for the women's charter showed the difficulty but also opportunities of promoting women's rights. While negotiations in United Nations processes show that governments find it difficult to agree on full protection of women's rights, there are also conservative forces among civil society. Promoting women's rights in CSO fora can be a challenge too. During the preparatory process and at the conference there was a dispute with Catholic NGOs on the term "sexual and reproductive rights" and regarding the demand for "decriminalization of abortion". However the dispute was resolved successfully in favour of women's rights. Both terms were, at the end, accepted by the broad majority of CSOs present. The women's chapter concludes that women's sexual and reproductive rights must be strengthened and fully realized, even if not directly accepted.

*Rosabel Agirregomezkorta* reflected on the 2013 Vienna+20 Basque Country Tribunal on Women's Rights. One of the instruments used by the feminist movement and diverse other organizations is the symbolic Tribunals or "Courts of Awareness". With this and other tools, they have played a key role in advancing towards gender equity in social and legislative contexts as well as within international institutions. The Tribunal carried out in Vienna in 1993 within the framework of the World Conference on Human Rights was a key point of reference for the Tribunal carried out in Bilbao, Spain, this year.

20 years earlier, during the Vienna Tribunal the testimonies of 33 women expressed the meaning of human rights in the lives of women, helping millions of women and men around the world to understand this concept. 20 years later, many of the demands for defence of women's rights raised in Vienna have yet to be achieved. This is why feminists carried out a Tribunal for Women's Rights in Bilbao. The process of convoking and carrying out the Tribunal contributed in itself to the collective empowerment of women through political action, symbolic reparation as well as achieving recognition for women and the feminist movement.

*Mayra Moro* gave a presentation with input from *Kasia Staszewska* who spoke through skype. They reflected on the CSO Partnership for Development Effectiveness (CPDE) and the governmental Aid and Development Effectiveness agenda. The CPDE is a structure set up in 2012 for civil society organization's (CSO's) joint efforts in the Aid and Development Effectiveness agenda which replaced the two structures *BetterAid* and *OpenForum* in order to channel CSO's official participation in the governmental process. One key question they addressed was whether it was strategic for feminists in Europe and elsewhere to keep engaging in this CSO process.

Mayra updated the audience on the structure and working of the CPDE as well as the advancements in the governmental process. She concluded that monitoring of the

governmental process is important. While human rights defenders have achieved some progress since the latest governmental aid agenda signed in Busan, 2011, we should be careful not to overstate the progress. Through monitoring, CSOs need to tell the real story. At the same time within the CSO agenda of the CPDE, there is a feminist approach taken on board through a lot of effort. There is a feminist co-chair in the international board, the presence of feminists is reserved in regional bodies, feminists approaches are recognized as a way of working for the platform, and women's key demands form the foundation document for advocacy.

The last presentation set the stage for the open floor debate. The efforts feminists have put into the process of the CPDE to influence the governmental process is a good example of an 'inside' advocacy strategy: trying to influence policies from a place within the policy process. The concrete examples of action from Spanish feminists showed the methods and achievements of an "outside" advocacy strategy. With the political hegemony of the neo-liberal model, the question was debated as to what extent an inside advocacy strategy should be pursued by feminists, or should we focus more on trying to change ideas and perceptions through creating alternatives and protesting loudly. Many interesting and valid points were made; most of all the meeting provided a feeling of strength that our local struggles for human rights are part of an international movement.

*Gea Meijers is communication facilitator at WIDE+.*



WIDE+ members discussing at the internal face to face meeting that was held the day after the public workshop, on 5 July, in Madrid, Spain. Read the report: <http://wideplusnetwork.wordpress.com/about/383-2/>.

## 20 years after: the Women's Human Rights paradigm in the current neoliberal context

The past 20 years show some progress with the women's rights and the human rights paradigm in Europe. However the development is caught up in the global neo-liberal transformation that at the same time is greatly undermining equality, protection of rights and the environment.

The neo-liberal development also impacts the women's rights agenda, leading to questions whether more freedom to express our identities is actually a real freedom or new standards for consumers to apply to. However for feminists the task is to keep pushing for the women's human rights agenda and to use it as our framework.

### *Christa Wichterich's presentation:*

The following three significant features and recent incidents show the ongoing neoliberal transformation in the EU:

- The crisis has come to stay. Austerity is governing politics. And banks fool governments and the public who bail them out – as the managers of the Anglo Irish did in an obscene and discreditable language. At the same time, the EU decides to earmark 6 million Euro to combat youth unemployment but 100 billion to bail out banks in the case of emergency.
- The legalization of homosexual marriages and the acceptance of LGBTIQ and homosexual parenthood is on its way in western European countries. Against this gain in human rights, right wing, neo-con and fundamentalist forces re-organise and stage massive protests. In the past two decades, a transnational reproductive industry and a bio-economy have been set up with body tissues and organs, stem cells, human eggs, and sperm as commodities and for example Indian women as surrogate mothers.
- The recent horrible disasters in the textile industry in Bangladesh where 1300 people, mostly women workers, lost their lives showed how much consumption, social reproduction and life style in the EU is still based on an unregulated and unfettered imperialistic pattern of exploitation of human and natural resources in the global South as much as it is on the exploitation of migrants working in the EU.

The highlighted incidents mirror a contradictory development: spaces and opportunities are shrinking, at the same time new spaces and opportunities are opening. From a human and gender rights perspective it is a paradox process of exclusion and inclusion, of abuse of citizens' rights and respect for rights.

### **Promotion of women's rights caught up with neo-liberal global order**

In the 1990s, it was the biggest achievement of the international women's movement and the global women's lobby to introduce the women's rights paradigm, including violence against women as human rights abuse, into the human rights agenda of the UN and into the various global governance regimes like environment and sustainability, population and development, peace and security. These interventions raised a lot of hope that through participation in various global governance regimes, quantitative and substantial, it could be insured that women's human rights would be respected, protected, promoted and fulfilled.

However, the rise of the women's human rights paradigm coincided with the emergence of the neo-liberal global order. Neoliberalism is based on a withdrawal of the state from the market, an economisation, privatisation and financialisation of many goods that have been outside of the market, and with a shift of responsibility to the individual as entrepreneur of her/himself.

While this neoliberal turn implies an attack on livelihoods and social cohesion, increasingly weaker sections of society and women were included into the liberalised markets. They got more access to paid labour and to financial services such as microcredit, mortgage, private insurances and credit cards. But this was a highly paradoxical economic and financial inclusion: the majority of women got precarious, low-paid, flexible, informal jobs, or micro- and subprime-credits with high interest rates that pulled many of them into indebtedness. Still, for many women, those new market opportunities implied a step forward in terms of access to market rights and individual empowerment. Nancy Fraser called this dilemma or trap an “uncanny congruence” of feminism and neo-liberalism. The neo-liberal political regime incorporates, sucks in or makes use of the human rights and the gender equality agenda and it co-opts progressive discourses and language.

### **Neo-liberal developments are attacking human rights and the planet**

Twenty years later, a lot of frustration about global governance has built up:

- The MDGs have not cohesively been rooted in the human rights paradigm and have not included gender mainstreaming in a systematic way.
- Feminist networks tried to intervene into macro-economics and the trade agenda, into the WTO- and FTA-regime. However, it seemed to be impossible to introduce a human rights agenda in order to balance and correct the free trade paradigm and investment rights of the corporate sector including the financial market. Market rights overrule and undermine the human rights agenda.

The multiple crises mirror that global governance completely failed to regulate the expansion of the capitalist economy that is corporate-driven, growth-oriented, resource- and emission-intensive. It is not guided and hardly tamed by a rights and needs framework. As a result we are confronted with a new multipolar power structure, deepening inequalities and man-made “natural” disasters all over the planet.

The rise and primacy of economic and financial governance has led in the countries of the North to “post-democracy” (Colin Crouch), a shrinking of democratic space and decision making, a loss of transparency and accountability, and a loss of public goods and commons. States to whom we addressed our rights claims have abandoned and corrupted their role as developmental and welfare states.

Through austerity regimes coined as the only solution to the debt crisis, states facilitate the reconfiguration of capitalism and the dismantling of the European social model. Austerity is a highly disciplinary regime that shifts economic power to the market and social responsibilities to the individuals. It downloads costs to the private households in terms of precarisation of wage and pension, unemployment, dismantling of public services and social security, increase in VAT as well as the privatisation of public goods. Austerity systematically undermines citizens’ rights and subjects them to so-called internal constraints and the logic of efficiency, productivity and competition while creating an ideological consensus that everybody has to sacrifice something.

Additionally, costs are shifted to the Global South e.g. to the offshore production of plenty of cheap consumer goods which flood the markets in the north. Textile exports from Bangladesh to the EU boomed in 2010 – actually in the middle of the EU crisis. The horrible incidents in the global textile industries revealed once again that fashion brands, retail labels and discounters from the North pressurize manufacturers in the South to minimize production costs, leading to the unregulated, unsafe construction of factories, the intensification of exploitation of mostly female labour, and the disregard of safety standards, minimum wages and labour rights.

Low priced consumer goods in crisisprone Europe are supposed to compensate for the precarisation of livelihoods and lack of social security and to pacify citizens. This kind of human rights violations correspond with the absence of human or workers rights clauses in trade agreements.

### **Seemingly increase of gender rights in neoliberal system: what does it entail?**

Negotiations of crucial global governance regimes like climate change and trade at the WTO have come to a standstill partially due to old controversies between North and South, partially because of new conflicts emerging within the multipolar power relations. However, in the middle of this deep crisis of international consensus--building e.g. in the climate change and in the biodiversity negotiations, a gender plan for equal participation was adopted. Is this acknowledgment of gender equality only a replacement action? How, do we get along with more rights within the neo-liberal patriarchal system? Is this part and parcel of a process of gender adjustment, assimilation and inclusion into the regime? Or is it a good starting point for critique and resistance from a feminist perspective?

Many feminists and queer people perceive and make use of openings within in the flexible capitalism and liberalised markets for building new subjectivities, sexualities and identities beyond the heteronormative gender order. They explore new individual rights and new freedom in the clinical, beauty, fitness and sexual industries. Really an uncanny compliance of demand and supply within the neoliberal regime! The marketization of reproduction is part and parcel of the ongoing reconfiguration of capitalism, which continues to economise and financialise whatever has not been completely commodified before: nature, public goods and commons, social reproduction and the human body.

### **Feminists need to keep struggling for the women's humanist paradigm**

All this makes us look at the women's human rights agenda in a much more ambivalent and complex way than we did twenty years back. At the same time the rights paradigm is not only a normative framework for our struggles, it is an indispensable tool. Claiming women's, human, citizens' and labour rights and scandalising abuse still is the main mobilising and organising tool for social movements and CSOs to counter rights abuses and to articulate a moral regime of social values, and a logic of solidarity against the global neoliberal order.

On a transnational level this was the case when CSOs organised around the adoption of a Convention for Domestic Workers at the ILO. This was the case when transnational and national CSOs and trade unions phrased a binding fire and safety accord for textile factories in Bangladesh and were able to persuade more than 30 big retail and fashion brands to sign it. Both the convention and the safety accord are only first and small steps towards establishing a rights regime against and over the market and the austerity regime in the crisis. Still, these are signals and symbols for our vision to give preference to human, women's and citizen's rights over the rights of private property, investors and corporations.

There is no alternative but to reclaim and to re-articulate the women's human rights agenda when struggling against the austerity regime and when negotiating the upcoming sustainable development goals. But most important: if we as feminists start transformative practices, reclaim commons and attempt to build economic and socio-ecological alternatives, those have to be rooted in the women's human rights agenda, in a concept of global citizenship and in deep democracy which overcomes the public-private divide and crosses over cultural boundaries and national borders.

*Christa Wichterich is Guest Professor at University Kassel and WIDE+ taskforce member.*

## WIDE+E in Spain and Europe: Feminism against patriarchal neoliberalism

The response of the Spanish government to the economic crisis in Spain has been to push forward neo-liberal policies combined with gender policies that directly curtail women's rights, such as a planned huge cutback in the right to abortion. This has decreased gender and social equality. But feminists and other citizens' movements fight back to reclaim their rights. In this struggle they are supported by the social movements protesting around the world. It is a task for WIDE+ to promote international solidarity.

*By Nines Fidalgo.*

I live in a country in which between 2008 to 2013 almost a million jobs done by women have been discarded, and 2.7 million "men's jobs" were lost. More than 6 million people are currently unemployed. For every 4 women or men you see on the street, 1 is unemployed. For the youth, it is 1 out of 2 persons, and 1 in 3 if they are immigrants.

The policy of the Spanish Government, encouraged by the European Union, has been to:

- take on the deficit of the banks, causing the housing bubble to burst;
- cut in rights and social services, driving, rather than restraining the rise in unemployment;
- use the crisis to privatize public services.

The state, according to its 2013 budget, has cut spending on health, education and care for dependent persons by 40 billion euros which is equal to the amount that has been allocated for the payment of interest on the debt that the state has unlawfully assumed as public debt from banks.

The dismantling of the welfare state services has increased the burden of family care that is mostly taken on by women, while discarding jobs in highly feminized sectors (e.g. in 2012, 173.098 jobs in the Health and Human Services were cut, which is 12% of the total), leading to pension cuts and doubling the gender gap in wages.

Added to this set of policies is the deliberate weakening of gender equality policies. Thus,

rather than counteracting the neoliberal 'treatment', social, including gender, inequality is increased. In three years time we have gone to a situation where the Ministry of Equality is on the brink of closing the Institute for Women created 30 years ago. In a similar restructuring process, the Youth Council -a channel for participation of youth organizations- is being suppressed at the same time as it openly supported the right to abortion.

The government is the first to violate the laws of gender equality. It has not approved the Equality Plan, which obliges the Equality Act 2007 that calls for Gender Impact Reports. It has withdrawn Spain from UN Women and has taken more than a year of delay in filing the quadrennial report to the UN CEDAW Committee.

The government intends to repeal the 2010 law that allows abortion in the first 14 weeks of pregnancy. It even wants to go further back than what was achieved in 1985 by imprisoning women who have abortions for fetal malformation as does El Salvador with Beatriz and thousands of women. There is also a setback in the fight against gender violence, with the reform of the penal code and cuts in spending. This, along with unemployment, have caused a fall by 4% in complaints of violence against women during 2012.

Neoliberal management of the economic crisis has in three years de-legitimized political institutions. In March 2013, according to official data, 76% of the population believes that the politicians and with it corruption are one of the three main problems of Spain.

What is the social response? From September 2010 to now, public action has taken shape more than ever: there have been four general strikes and numerous demonstrations. In 2011 the Movement '15M' –a grassroots collective driven by two significant movements: 'Youth Without Future' and 'Real Democracy'- took a new generation to the streets and has introduced new policy approaches and forms of collaboration, including the current 'Feminisms 15M'.



The feminist movement, in its diversity, has increased its focus on the economy and its impact on gender; it has come closer to the street, it has sought alliances with current social movements such as 'Citizen Tide' and Tidal movements as 'White' or 'Green' and with working people or users of the Health and Education services. The feminist movement also has moved closer to the (women) human rights activists and professionals in the field of development cooperation. Together they have responded to plans of curtailing of the right to abortion and created Purple Tide (Marea

Violeta), in which feminists of diverse organizations, including development organizations, have come together 10 times since January 2012 in various cities, under the common denominator of the visibility of feminism as part of the protest and as the alternative.

The situation in our country is overwhelming. However, we should not forget that we are part of a similar development in Europe and the world. This

development is not only about governments and neoliberal powers leading to loss of jobs and shrinking of public goods such as school and hospitals -a policy that has no heart for real people but only cares about wealth. The trend is also about defending citizenship and social movements who share our goals and struggles. Particularly we perceive support from Latin American feminist movements, as they have close hand experience with social movements fighting against neoliberalism in their countries.

For the feminist movement in Europe, with WIDE+ Network as an important part of it, there is a task in this. We need to coordinate South-South and North-South solidarity.

*By Nines Fidalgo, President of the Feminist Policy Forum and member of WIDE-Spain.*

This article is translated into English by Gea Meijers. For the original Spanish version: <http://wideplusnetwork.wordpress.com/news/wide-en-espana-y-europa-feminismo-contra-el-neoliberalismo-patriarcal/>



## The Vienna+20 NGO Conference “Human rights in crisis“

More than 140 persons from various CSOs around the world gathered in Vienna on 25-26 June 2013, on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights and its Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action.

Main organizers of the NGO conference were FIAN International and its international partners, together with a range of Austrian NGOs, among them WIDE Austria. The CSO event was followed up on 27 and 28 June by a conference hosted by the Austrian government, bringing together high-level representatives of governments, international organizations, UN special rapporteurs, and (invited) civil society speakers.

*By Claudia Thallmayer.*

### The Vienna+20 CSO Declaration: reclaiming the primacy of Human Rights

The conference discussed and adopted a forward looking declaration, based on months of extensive prior consultations in various preparatory groups on the different parts. WIDE Austria was active in the preparation of the women’s rights chapter. The Declaration was adopted with broad support on 26 June, at the end of the NGO conference.

The Vienna+20 CSO Declaration stresses the primacy of human rights. Respect, protection and fulfilment of all human rights are the first responsibilities of states. Despite progress made in human rights protection, vested interests, -in particular corporate interests- tend to prevail, even in multilateral fora and agreements. Especially economic, social and cultural rights still lack adequate forms of legal sanctions compared to other legal regimes such as international commercial law.

The CSO conference participants expressed deep concern over the increasing criminalization of and assaults upon human rights defenders – including refugees and migrants. They also expressed deep concern over the increasing exploitation of women in the context of global capitalism.

The conference affirmed that the realization of women’s rights and gender equality, along with the right to live free from discrimination, lays a key foundation for the whole of human rights.

### Women’s human rights in the CSO Declaration

For the chapter on women’s rights, main contributions came from international women’s networks with WIDE Austria. The cooperation among women’s networks was very fruitful. The cooperation was particularly good with ‘World March of Women’, ‘ESCR Net – Working Group on Women and Economic, Social and Cultural Rights’ and the ‘Center for Women’s Global Leadership’ who – together with WIDE Austria – acted as lead organizations in this part of the preparatory process.

In the women’s rights chapter, emphasis was put on:

- the intersection of different forms / multiple discrimination;
- the necessity to tackle seriously all forms of violence against women, and to end impunity;
- women’s access to justice;
- the economic, social and cultural rights of women (workers rights, rights to social protection, etc.) which are undermined by austerity measures and privatization of public services. Those policies increase women’s multiple responsibility and

workload in paid and unpaid work. The chapter calls for a “recognition and fair share of unpaid work between men and women” and the demand for a “gender sensitive development cooperation”;

- the human rights of migrant women;
- women’s sexual and reproductive rights, which “must be strengthened and fully realized”.

During the preparatory process and at the conference, there was a dispute with Catholic NGOs on the term “sexual and reproductive rights” and regarding the demand for “decriminalization of abortion”. Both terms were at the end accepted by the broad majority. It is important to note that besides the statement in the women’s rights paragraph that “sexual rights



In the morning, at the start of this conference, WIDE organized a rally for women’s rights, “A red carpet for women’s rights – stumbling blocks out of the way!”. The action was supported by a number of NGO activists who had participated at the CSO conference.

include the non-discrimination in regard to one’s sexual orientation and gender identity”, These rights are also mentioned in a separate paragraph on “Sexual orientation” at the end of the NGO Declaration, as both women and men (and transgendered persons) are affected by hate crimes and discriminatory practises.

### **International obligations with regard to human rights – extraterritorial states’ obligations**

The red line throughout the CSO conference was the critique on the substantial gaps in human rights protection, arising from the fact that many states

still interpret their obligations as being applicable only, or primarily, within their own borders. Referring to a compilation of international responsibilities already defined in international Human Rights law that can be found in the “Maastricht Principles on Extraterritorial Obligations of States in the Area of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights”, it was pointed out that without the acceptance and implementation of extraterritorial obligations, human rights cannot be universally realized, nor can they play a substantial role in the regulation of globalization.

The Vienna+20 CSO Declaration demands accountability and binding regulation of transnational corporations and intergovernmental organizations and reminds States of their human rights obligations in the context of international cooperation and assistance.

Further concrete demands are:

- to address trade and investment laws, policies and agreements from the Human Rights perspective (for example as a result, NGOs demand from States to withdraw from ICSID, the World Bank Center for the settlement of investment disputes);
- to anchor extra-territorial Human Rights obligations in national laws;
- to establish a World Court on Human Rights.

The NGO conference also called for a World Conference on Human Rights in 2018. 25 years after the Second World Conference on Human Rights in 1993 the time will have come for a Third World Conference on Human Rights,

### **Links:**

All materials and events around Vienna+20: [www.viennaplus20.org](http://www.viennaplus20.org)

CSO Declaration Vienna+20: <http://viennaplus20.files.wordpress.com/2013/07/vienna-20-cso-declaration-final-post2.pdf>

ETO Consortium: “Maastricht Principles”: <http://www.etoconsortium.org/en/library/maastricht-principles/>

*Claudia Thallmayer is one of the two coordinators at WIDE Austria. WIDE Austria is a platform member of WIDE+.*

## WIDE+E at the 2013 Vienna+20 Basque Country Tribunal on Women's Rights

One of the instruments used by the feminist movement and diverse other organizations is the symbolic Tribunals or “Courts of Awareness”. With this and other tools, feminists and other human rights activists have been able to advance towards gender equity in social and legislative contexts as well as within international institutions. The Tribunal carried out in Vienna in 1993 within the framework of the World Conference on Human Rights was a key point of reference for the Tribunal carried out in Bilbao, Spain, this year.

*By Rosabel Agirregomezkorta*

Held on 7 and 8 June, the Vienna+20 Tribunal was convened by the organization Mugarik Gabe together with more than 20 feminist organizations, development NGO's and other social movements from the Basque country.

20 years earlier, during the Vienna Tribunal the testimonies of 33 women led to a recognition that women had been made invisible by history. Their voices at the same time reaffirmed that women are humans and therefore deserving of all the rights already granted to men. Through their testimonies the meaning of human rights in the lives of women acquired a concrete manifestation that helped millions of women and men around the world to understand this concept. The Vienna Tribunal taught many women new ways of thinking about the use of the United Nations mechanisms to establish accountability for violations of women's human rights.

20 years later, many of the demands for defence of women's rights raised in Vienna are still to be achieved. This is why we carried out a Tribunal for Women's Rights in Bilbao. The cases heard recounted the violation of three specific human rights:

1. The right to a life free of violence;
2. The right to abortion;
3. The right to a dignified standard of living for women.

During the Tribunal, women from different backgrounds and regions were heard. 8 cases were put on trail. Women's rights experts for each of the three rights carried out an analysis of the progress and setbacks in pursuit of each right. The 8 women plaintiffs presented their cases and finally, the women prosecutors made requests to the International Tribunal asking for reparation of the damages inflicted in each case. The cases heard were from the Basque country, the Spanish state, Colombia, El Salvador and Guatemala. They all made violence against women visible as a global reality, though with different expressions and magnitude according to the place in which they occurred.

Over 300 people were present in the court and the proceedings were witnessed by more than 500 viewers through a live webcast. The Tribunal also attracted significant media attention.

This Tribunal has contributed in making sexist violence visible. These multiple forms of violence are a result of inequalities, which are in themselves a violation of women's human rights in the Basque country, the Spanish state and throughout Latin America.

The convocation and carrying out of the Tribunal contributed in itself to the collective empowerment of women through political action, symbolic reparation as well as achieving recognition for women and the feminist movement.

The results of the Tribunal were formulated in a final resolution. It demonstrated the need for a review of the political and judicial systems that define and apply laws from an androcentric perspective. It demonstrated the necessity of incorporating into these institutions a political and feminist methodology.

The 2013 Vienna +20 Basque Country Tribunal on Women's Rights ended with the reading of the final decisions by an international jury consisting of seven women and one man from different backgrounds, with recognised social, academic and legal prestige.

The resolution is a valuable document for ongoing work in the defence of the rights of women. It opens a period for intervention not only with regard to each of the cases presented; It also shows that we need to review not only the application of legislative and judicial measures in the specific areas involved but also the way in which the law and other international instruments are conceived of and understood by the institutions involved. We need to question the views and interpretations of the legal frameworks (what they are understanding as

poverty or development for example, as they are reduced to hunger and aid).

The organizers will now enter into a period of making contacts and generating synergies in combined efforts with other organizations, among them WIDE+ which is invited to take part in the process.

Final Resolution: [Spanish version](#), English: <http://wideplusnetwork.wordpress.com/news/widee-at-the-2013-vienna20-basque-country-tribunal-on-womens-rights/>

For more information: [www.mugarikgabe.org](http://www.mugarikgabe.org)  
[www.tribunalderechosmujeres2013.blogspot.com.es](http://www.tribunalderechosmujeres2013.blogspot.com.es)

Or contact: Joana Etxano (bilbao[at]mugarikgabe.org) or Lidia Ruiz (araba[at]mugarikgabe.org).

*Rosabel Agirregomezkorta, direccion(at)ceim.eu, Centro de estudios e Investigación sobre Mujeres, CEIM, WIDE-E (Spanish platform) Coordinator.*

## EDITORIAL TEAM

**WIDE+ contact mail: [info@wide-network.org](mailto:info@wide-network.org)**

Editorial team: Gea Meijers and Filomenita Mongaya Høgsholm with the support of Kinga Lohmann. All presentations were collected by Rosabel Agirregomezkorta.

*Articles reflect the author's personal view and do not represent WIDE+.*

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