

HE Minister L. Ploumen
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
The Netherlands

Re: FLOW 2016-2020 decision

12 December 2015 (*updated version 7 Jan '16*)

Honourable Minister Ploumen

This letter is sent to you by many of the current Women's Rights and Feminist organisations, including many who benefited from the FLOW-I funding scheme of your Ministry.

We thank you for your personal commitment to gender equality and women's rights and much appreciate your efforts to continue the opportunities created by your predecessors with the MDG3 Fund and the FLOW-I fund (*that provided funds to over 35-50 national, regional and global coalitions*).

These funds have been essential in empowering civil society organizations (CSOs) and social movements working for women's human rights. Thanks to these funds, diverse women-led organisations were able to work at a local and regional level as well as to bridge the gap to the global policy processes on development. This included the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's), ensuring a strong stand-alone goal (SDG5) on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, as well as gender-responsive targets in many of the other global goals.

However, the decision to only fund nine projects in this new round - out of 100 that passed the eligibility test, and going from an average 2,4 to 9.5 million per grantee - is breaking the backbone of the global women's human rights movement. We are extremely worried that hundreds of local, national and regional women-led organisations who used to benefit from your support, - directly or indirectly as sub-grantees of FLOW beneficiaries - will have to end their activities, or severely scale back programmes, and that this will have very negative impacts on especially the most vulnerable groups of women.

This is why we need to sound the alarm.

The FLOW fund is the only remaining large global fund, which focuses on women's rights and empowerment. High expectations were raised when it was announced to the world, and when the Dutch Government invited other donor countries to join. It was presented as the main global fund to help implement the new SDGs in a gender-equitable manner, with a focus on SDG5.

Feminist, women's human rights and feminist organisations have been shown to be essential to advance, sustain, protect and implement women's human rights, as numerous evidence from e.g. AWID and UN Women has shown. Had it not been for the local active women's rights movements, there would not have been the progress made¹.

Such women-led CSOs and the women's funds financing their activities are traditionally anyway under-resourced, and financially much smaller than other more mainstream 'development' organisations. It has often been difficult to compete for funding with these larger development organisations, and **it has been very important that a 'dedicated' funding mechanism for women's rights organisations - such as the MDG3 and FLOW funds - exists.**

Even though the text on the Dutch Ministry's website states that the new FLOW (2016-2020) is based on the same principles as the previous MDG3 and FLOW funds, the criteria for application were dramatically changed. We wonder why the call was opened to all large, international, organisations and why the minimum application amount was increased from 3 to 5 million Euro's. In addition, although we had called for accessibility and simplified application procedures, **the application form and its criteria were much more challenging** than the large-scale funding programs of your Ministry (such as MFS, Strategic Partnerships), thus **creating significant barriers** for many feminist and women's human rights organisations to apply.

We would have hoped that the selection committee - seeing the very difficult situation in which women's rights organisations find themselves - would have taken the decision to **share limited resources as strategically as possible**. Instead, it seems that a selection process favouring mainly Northern/Dutch/Anglophone proposals, **is putting at risk the existence of hundreds of women's rights organisations** at the frontlines.

It furthermore seems that the excellent results of the on-going FLOW project are **not sufficiently taken into account nor leveraged**. Resources invested and capacity built are being undone. Only one out of all FLOW I women's organisations is amongst the nine FLOW II awardees.

This is tragic, undermines the critical gender justice and women's human rights work that FLOW has supported in the past, and sets a dangerous precedent for the future.

Therefore, we call to:

1. Improve and adjust the decision for FLOW 2016-2020
2. Ensure a bridging fund for FLOW I organisations
3. Learn from the problems of the application process to create criteria, structures, and processes that empower - not disempower - women's rights organisations, with the aim

¹ Sources: AWID 2013 'Watering the leaves, starving the roots', <http://www.awid.org/publications/watering-leaves-starving-roots>

Htun and Weldon, 2013. 'Feminist mobilisation and progressive policy change: why governments take action to combat violence against women'

to ensure that all donors can use these lessons and criteria to really put women at the centre of the implementation of the SDGs, particularly SDG5.

The undersigned organisations believe that the Dutch Government should provide the best **example to the world on how to strengthen women's organisations and social movements**, to allow them to **continue to play their pivotal role** in ensuring implementation of the 2030 Agenda will strengthen women's rights and gender equality.

We kindly request an urgent meeting with you soonest, if at all possible before 19th December 2015, to further discuss our concerns expressed above.

Sincerely,

Supporters of this letter are:

1. 1325 Action Group, Nepal
2. ABANTU for Development
3. Action Works Nepal
4. Adequations, France
5. African Indigenous Women's Organization
6. African Woman and Child Features Service Kenya
7. Akina Mama wa Afrika
8. Akshara Centre, India
9. ALGA
10. APEDDUB, Tunisia
11. APWLD Asia Pacific forum on Women Law and Development
12. Arab Science and Technology Foundation
13. ASR Resource Centre, Lahore, Pakistan
14. Association Burkinabé pour la Survie de l'Enfance, Burkina Faso
15. Association of War Affected Women and Friends of AWAW
16. Bahamas Crisis Centre
17. Balance, Mexico
18. Beyond Beijing Committee
19. Calcutta Research Group
20. Center for Egyptian Women's Legal Assistance (CEWLA)
21. Centre for Human Rights and Climate Change Research, Nigeria
22. Citizens' Voice for Justice and Peace, Sri LANKA.
23. Concorcio
24. Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd
25. Coordinadora de la Mujer, Bolivia
26. Dandelion Kenya
27. Diverse Voices and Action for Equality, Fiji
28. EMMA Organization for Human Development Kurdistan/Iraq
29. Equality Bahamas
30. ETC group
31. European Network of Migrant Women
32. FEIM Fundacion para Estudio e Investigacion de la Mujer, Argentina

33. Feminist Task Force
34. FemLINKPACIFIC
35. FemLINKPACIFIC
36. FEMNET (African Women's Development and Communication Network)
37. FOKUS - Forum for Women and Development
38. Forum for Women in Democracy (FOWODE), Uganda
39. Fundación Centro de Estudios de la Mujer
40. GABRIELA Philippines
41. Gender and Water Alliance (Netherlands and Bangladesh)
42. Gender at Work
43. Gender Links, Africa
44. GENDER-CENTER, Moldova
45. Gender and Development Network (UK)
46. GFC Global Forest Coalition
47. Global Network of Women Peacebuilders
48. GROOTS Trinidad and Tobago
49. Huairou Commission
50. Humanos con Recursos
51. Indigenous Information Network and the African Indigenous Women's Organization
52. INSTITUT PEREMPUAN (WOMEN'S INSTITUTE), Indonesia
53. Institute for Women's Empowerment, Hong Kong
54. Institute of Women's Studies, Lahore, Pakistan
55. International Council of Women
56. International Federation of Women in Legal Careers
57. International Federation of Women Lawyers
58. International Indigenous Women's Forum
59. International Women's Health Coalition (IWHC)
60. International Women's Right's Project
61. International Women's Rights Action Watch Asia Pacific
62. Ipas, Brazil
63. Isis-Women's International Cross Cultural Exchange (Isis-WICCE)
64. IT for Change
65. KULU-Women and Development, Denmark
66. L'action pour le developpement de l'enfant et la femme
67. Libyan Forum For Civil Society
68. Mama Cash
69. MEXFAM, Mexico
70. Minority Gender Action (mingnac)
71. Muslims for Progressive Values (MPV)
72. National Alliance of Women Human Right defenders- NAWHRD, Nepal
73. Niger Delta Women's Movement for Peace & Development
74. ONDEDE
75. Organizing Action Towards Humanity (OATH), Pakistan
76. Pacific Partnerships on Gender, Climate Change and Sustainable Development (PPGCCSD)
77. PAN Africa
78. Pesticide Action Network Asia and the Pacific (PANAP)
79. Post-2015 Women's Coalition
80. Programme on Women's Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (PWESCR)
81. Reaccion Climatica, Bolivia

82. Red de Mujeres del Caribe Costarricense REMUCA
83. REPEM
84. Réseau des Organisations Féminines d'Afrique Francophone ROFAF, Togo
85. Rural Women's Network Nepal (RUWON Nepal)
86. RUWON Nepal
87. Saathi, Nepal
88. SAMYAK, Pune
89. Sanctus Initiative for Human Development and Values Sustainability (SIHDEVAS)
90. SERR, USA
91. SERVITAS Cameroon
92. Shirkat gah, Pakistan
93. Society of Catholic Medical Missionaries
94. South Sudan Women General Association
95. Uganda youth alliance for family planning and adolescents health (UYAFPAH)
96. Union de l 'Action Féministe
97. Vagahau Niue Trust, New Zealand
98. Vision Spring Initiatives, Nigeria
99. WAVE Australia
100. WECF International
101. WEP Women Environment Program, Africa
102. WIDE Austria
103. WIDE+ (Women In Development Europe+)
104. WILDAF WEST AFRICA
105. WOCAN
106. Women and Media Collective, Sri Lanka
107. Women for Water Partnership
108. Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO)
109. Women Media and Development TAM
110. Women Peace Group in Kurdistan/Iraq
111. Women's UN Report Network (WUNRN)
112. Women's Rehabilitation center- wrec, Nepal
113. World YWCA
114. WPP Women Peace Makers Program
115. WWHR - Women for Women's Human Rights - New Ways
116. Young Women's Leadership Institute (YWLI), Kenya

Individual signatories:

- Charlotte Bunch - Founding Director and Senior Scholar, Center for Women's Global Leadership, Rutgers University,
- Carlo Angeles, Executive Director of Somos el Presente
- Pefi Kingi, Executive Director, Pacific Womens' International Networks-NZ (Pacificwin-NZ)

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