

10 December statement for the 70th Anniversary of the Declaration of Human Rights

As feminists and human rights activists from across Europe, on this 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in the 25th anniversary year of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, we reaffirm women's rights as human rights and demand the full and effective protection and realization of human rights across the globe. We do this at a time when human rights and women's rights are continuously violated, or under threat. As we celebrated the recognition of women's rights as human rights 25 years ago, we could not imagine the setbacks we are experiencing today.

The reality of illiberal democracies and right-wing populisms around the world implies massive attacks on democratic principles, the idea of equal rights and political participation, the rule of law, and the rights of civil society and free media. Attacks on women, women's rights and human rights defenders are our daily reality.

Antifeminism is facing us in multiple guises, and millions of women continue to experience violence in private and public spaces, including the digital world. Women's bodily autonomy - especially their sexual and reproductive rights and the free expression of gender identity and sexual orientation – is far from ensured. Instead, efforts to constrain women's rights are rising. State responses remain inadequate. International agreements such as the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (the Istanbul Convention) are being questioned, ridiculed, and stalled. Education on human rights, gender and diversity is increasingly being dismissed as irrelevant, if not suppressed outright. Religious fundamentalisms and nationalisms, even neo-fascism, are creating a climate of everyday misogyny, disrespect and hostility toward human rights across the globe.

In the past seventy years, global economic realities have continued to discriminate women. Gender pay gaps have not been closed. Wealth has been amassed in the hands of a few – mostly white men, while social and economic inequalities are expanding. Austerity and free trade policies have polarized societies and increased the burden of unpaid and care work on the shoulders of women.

Wars, violence, the absence of democracy and human rights protection, poverty and a lack of future prospects are driving millions of people from their homes. As migrants and refugees, women face gender-specific threats and exploitation on the road and upon arrival. As human rights advocates, we hear countless stories by migrant and refugee women who have been raped and exploited, and who tell us of sisters killed attempting to escape.

We reaffirm the Human Rights Declaration's basic ideas seventy years after strong women's rights activists, such as Minerva Bernardino from the Dominican Republic, Hansa Mehta from India, Begum Shaista Ikramullah from Pakistan, alongside Committee Chair Eleanor Roosevelt from the US, left their marks on the Declaration. Our commitment is to women's rights as part of a larger struggle for global social justice and human rights. Gender justice can only be brought about if intersecting unequal power relations are redressed, including economic, environmental, social, sexual, racial, generational and ethnic discrimination. We want a world in which the rights and wellbeing of people and the planet have priority over profit. And we continue to strive for social transformation toward societies in which everyone has the power to control productive assets and resources, influence the decisions affecting their lives, decide over their own body and life, and develop to their full potential.