

# BERLIN DECLARATION 2023

## Women Peacebuilders, Humanitarian Responders and Human Rights Defenders Call on the World to Invest in their Work on the Frontlines

25 May 2023, Berlin, Germany

We are leaders and practitioners representing 87 local women's rights organizations led by women, young women, and marginalized groups from Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, Asia, including South Asia and the Pacific, Europe, and the Middle East. We have come together in Berlin at the Global Women's Forum for Peace and Humanitarian Action on 23-25 May 2023 (GWF 2023)<sup>1</sup> to celebrate our achievements, learn from each other, and call on the global community to recognize, amplify, and support our work.

We work daily to make our societies more safe, inclusive, and resilient. Our communities trust us, because we understand their realities and they see the unique impacts of our transformative work. We are peacebuilders and first responders who **address the urgent needs of our communities during crises, challenge patriarchal norms to foster a culture of peace, and influence key policies to build a more gender equal and peaceful world.**

More than twenty-two years since the **UN Security Council Resolution 1325** first established the Women, Peace, and Security agenda, nine more related resolutions have been adopted, and multiple other commitments made. In 2016, humanitarian actors gathered at the World Humanitarian Summit and adopted the Grand Bargain – a unique agreement, including commitments to more localized and inclusive humanitarian action. The commitments were reinforced with Grand Bargain 2.0, adopted in 2022. In 2020, building on the foundation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action, the Global Compact on WPS and HA was created to catalyze and accelerate the implementation of the commitments on WPS. However, **patriarchal norms continue to dominate our societies, affecting every aspect of our lives. Our work is still invisible, and our safety is often threatened.** We continue to face the following challenges:

- **The number and complexity of crises is growing, and armed conflict, political instability, climate change, sudden onset disasters, food insecurity, forced displacement on an unprecedented scale, and chronic marginalization push us into a constant state of emergency.** Our lives, rights and bodies are increasingly at the core of political crises and violent conflicts.
- **The backlash against our rights – including hate speech and gender-based violence – is growing and prevents our meaningful participation.** This makes it acceptable for governments and societies to be openly anti-gender, anti-women, anti-feminist, anti-trans and patriarchal. As a result, we are deprived of our basic rights, including sexual and reproductive rights, inheritance rights and economic and education opportunities, and our mobility is restricted – some of us must be accompanied by a man in public, and we face additional barriers in obtaining visas to travel.
- **The space for our work is shrinking drastically** and the number of threats to our lives is growing.

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<sup>1</sup> More information on the GWF 2023 is available at: <https://wphfund.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/ENGLISH-WPHF-Global-Womens-Forum-2023-Concept-Note.pdf>

- **We face exhaustion, burnout, and trauma.** However, our wellbeing and mental health are not viewed as a priority and rarely supported financially.
- **The scarcity of funding makes it more difficult for us to operate and pushes us to compete rather than build coalitions and synergies.** Funding opportunities are often project-based, short-term, and inflexible. As a result, we struggle to pay our staff and sustain our work. Time-consuming, highly technical, and bureaucratic procedures make it difficult to access financing – especially for rural, grassroots and community organizations, people with disabilities, and young people and people from historically oppressed and marginalized communities.
- **We remain marginalized from peace processes, political decision-making, and humanitarian interventions. Even when women sit at the table, we are not listened to,** despite the fact that experience shows us that when women do not meaningfully participate, global crises ensue.

**These grave challenges are exacerbated for women who face additional discrimination, exclusion, invisibility and violence** based on ethnicity, economic status, age, ability, sexual orientation and gender identity, such as young women and girls, elderly women, Black, Brown, Afro-descendent and indigenous women, widows, women veterans, women with disabilities, lesbian, bisexual and trans women, women living with HIV, refugee and internally displaced women, women living in host communities, women migrants, women former combatants, women in rural communities, those without access to modern technologies, women living in territories with disputed political status, and other marginalized groups.

We are leaving Berlin energized, inspired, and committed to re-double our efforts to tackle these challenges. We have devised joint strategies that we are already putting in action. However, the burden of responsibility does not lie solely with us.

**This is why we turn to governments, donors, the United Nations (UN), international NGOs and private companies with a call to demonstrate feminist and ethical leadership and take the following actions:**

- 1. Take a firm, decisive and uncompromising stance against attacks on our safety, wellbeing, lives and work and against the patriarchal norms that lead to the normalization of violence, gender apartheid and gender persecution.**
  - 1.1. Member States, UN and other international organizations** should publicly and strongly condemn violations of women’s rights committed by governmental or non-governmental actors, including extremist groups, impose decisive, targeted political and economic sanctions on actors involved in such violations, and avoid perpetuating hateful discourses and discrimination.
  - 1.2. Member States, UN and other international organizations** should take concrete and tangible actions to support self-protection practices and mechanisms of women, young women, and girls in all their diversity, including women with disabilities and forcibly displaced women.
  - 1.3. Donors** should recognize that physical and mental wellbeing of local peacebuilders, civil society leaders, humanitarian responders and human rights defenders is a key priority and insist to include specific budget for protection equipment and training, as well as for psychosocial support and healing to in all peacebuilding and humanitarian programs. This should include locally led, locally owned and innovative approaches to trauma-healing, which respect the local cultures and worldviews and build on contextual and ancestral knowledge.
  - 1.4. Humanitarian actors, including UN, INGOs and other international organizations** should create safe spaces for grassroots humanitarian responders, as well as international and

national staff, to share their challenges, heal their trauma and build resilience, as well as fast, reliable, and confidential channels for the reporting of any abuse faced by them.

- 1.5. Member States, UN, international organizations, INGOs and other donors** should increase their efforts to amplify the visibility of the work and impacts of local and grassroots women-led and women's rights civil society, in contexts where greater visibility can foster trust and decrease the risks they face rather than expose them to retaliation. This should include connecting local women activists in all their diversity with media actors, training journalists, and providing dedicated funding for the documentation and promotion of impacts by local and grassroots women-led and women's rights organizations.
- 2. Make radical changes to the existing financing structures and mechanisms by providing long-term, flexible and core funding available to grassroots and local organizations, including those led by women and young women in all their diversity**
  - 2.1. UN** should use its convening role to organize a donor conference focused on feminist financing and financing for local peacebuilders, bring together top decision-makers from donor entities to discuss concrete ways of fulfilling their commitment to more accessible financing and make specific pledges of funding for grassroots women-led and women's rights organizations. The convening should include an experience exchange with feminist funding organizations, to learn from their approaches and strategies in funding diverse organizations, including those led by young women, Black women, and women with disabilities.
  - 2.2. UN and International Financial Institutions** should ensure that women meaningfully participate and lead in the process of the reform of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, called for by the Secretary-General during the G7 Summit in Hiroshima in May 2023.
  - 2.3. Donors** should create space for women's leadership and meaningful participation at all stages of funding cycles, beginning with the design of funding streams and opportunities.
  - 2.4. Donors** should review their eligibility criteria, significantly simplify their application and reporting procedures, and ensure the funding they provide is accessible, including to organizations led by people with disabilities, refugees, Black women, and other marginalized groups.
  - 2.5. Donors** should also ensure their funding is long-term and provides local women's rights and women-led organizations with the flexibility to adapt to the changing environment and provide holistic responses, operating along the peace-development-humanitarian nexus, for example, by implementing emergency response alongside livelihood programs and peace education.
  - 2.6. Donors** should also provide rapidly and immediately accessible, short-term funding for women-led and women's rights organizations to address urgent crises and protection needs. This must take into account challenges women and organizations face in accessing funds through banks.
  - 2.7. Donors** should ensure their procedures are localized and contextualized, for example by allowing for flexibility in supporting unregistered organizations and informal groups in contexts where registration may not be possible and maintaining flexibility on thematic areas of funding in contexts where officially working on specific themes may put activists at risk.
  - 2.8. Donors** should amplify and report on their fulfilment of the UN Secretary-General's call to multiply by five direct assistance to women's organizations, currently at 0.2 per cent.
  - 2.9. Donors** should invite women in all their diversity to donor conferences and ensure that they are able to meaningfully participate and influence the discussions.

3. **Foster and amplify organizing, movement-building and solidarity among grassroots, local and national women civil society leaders and activists at national, regional and global levels.**
  - 3.1. **Donors** should create dedicated funding opportunities for building and strengthening of feminist civil society movements and regional coalitions. This funding should target specifically grassroots and local organizations led by women in all their diversity, including women with disabilities, rural women, young women, those forcibly displaced and living in exile, nomad women, informal women's groups, and others that may lack access to networking opportunities.
  - 3.2. **International organizations, INGOs and UN** should regularly convene regional and global experience exchanges to build trust and genuine collaboration among women's rights and women-led organizations and women and young women leaders, such as GWF 2023. They should strive to target in particular women who have limited or no access to such spaces.
  - 3.3. **International organizations, INGOs and UN** should support – financially and technically – the establishment of spaces and platforms for regular and ongoing coordination, exchange of experiences and building of solidarity among local and grassroots civil society organizations led by women and people from other marginalized groups. This could include leveraging digital technologies to create and sustain regional and global virtual communities of practice, as well as organizing of capacity-building and knowledge-sharing workshops.
  - 3.4. **Women-led and women's rights organizations** should leverage existing and new regional platforms – including the coalitions established during GWF 2023, for coordination to exchange information about crises, implement early warning and prevent illicit arms flows, support, and amplify each other's advocacy, co-create feminist research and knowledge, and exchange and formulate joint priorities to influence regional and global policies, as well as peace processes.
  - 3.5. **Women-led and women's rights organizations** should consider including men and boys, including those in power, as allies in their coalitions and convenings, if they find it appropriate, to challenge patriarchal norms, address gender-based violence in their personal lives and broader society, and to address the challenges faced by young men and boys in a patriarchal society.
4. **Ensure that we can participate in and use our peacebuilding experience and expertise to influence all electoral, political decision-making and peace processes**
  - 4.1. **Donors** should improve their support for programmes and initiatives aimed at increasing women's participation in elections and politics at both local and national levels, including supporting organizing and convening of women and young women in all their diversity before critical decision-making processes, to enable them to develop joint political agendas.
  - 4.2. **Donors, international organizations and INGOs** should recognize that economic independence is a pre-requisite for women's meaningful participation and provide financial and technical support for sustainable livelihood programs and addressing food insecurity.
  - 4.3. **National and local governments**, including national human rights institutions, should create flexible channels to coordinate with women-led and women's rights organizations to leverage their expertise and support them in implementing transformative laws.
  - 4.4. **Member States, UN and regional and international organizations involved in mediating peace processes** should demand meaningful participation of women in all their diversity as a pre-requisite for their support to any process. The modalities of the participation should be defined and assessed in consultation with women-led and women's rights organizations.
5. **Recognize that our expertise is fundamental to prevent and address global humanitarian crises and foster climate justice**

- 5.1. Governments and humanitarian actors** should prioritize and demand the participation and leadership of diverse local women in decision-making structures in humanitarian crises, including refugee camp committees and UN coordination clusters.
- 5.2. Donors** should recognize local women's rights and women-led civil society organizations as legitimate humanitarian responders and provide them with flexible and sustainable funding.
- 5.3. International organizations, INGOs and other humanitarian actors** should proactively include women's rights and women-led organizations in context analysis, designing interventions, to adequately capture contextual impacts of intersecting humanitarian crises, such as the climate, food insecurity and refugee crises and their underlying drivers, such as the debt crisis.
- 5.4. International organizations, INGOs and other humanitarian actors** must pay greater attention to the needs of women with disabilities and recognize their unique abilities and contributions.
- 5.5. Member States, international organizations, INGOs and other humanitarian and development actors** should invest in enhancing rural women's capacities to address food insecurity. This can include the use of innovation, digitalization, and efficient technologies for rural women in all their diversity to overcome environmental and climate change challenges.