

Soroptimist International's Response to the Political Declaration of CSW59

Soroptimist International is a grassroots organisation that speaks on behalf of 80,000 women from more than 3,000 communities in 130 countries and territories. Soroptimists have united around the principles of educating, empowering and enabling women and girls locally, nationally, and internationally. All of Soroptimist International's positions are based on their voices, perspectives and opinions.

Reaffirming political will to promote, protect and fulfil the human rights of women and girls, and the commitment to eliminate remaining gaps and challenges in the implementation of the 12 Critical Areas of Concern of the Beijing Platform for Action is the minimum that all governments, NGOs and civil society should agree this CSW. These same states committed to the eradication of gender inequality 20 years ago, and these commitments should not be forgotten.

On the occasion of Beijing+20, we should be able to gather at the UN to celebrate the progress that has been made towards achieving gender equality. However, when faced with strong push back on previously agreed language on gender equality, women's equal enjoyment of their human rights, and the empowerment of women and girls, it is impossible to celebrate. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge the valuable work of the Bureau and supportive states in advocating from women and girls throughout a challenging negotiation process.

The agreed political declaration for CSW59 is notable not for what it says, but for what it does not say. This is a political declaration that is vague; it does not acknowledge appropriately the ongoing discrimination that women and girls experience nor are emerging issues addressed adequately. The girl child, older women, indigenous women and girls, and other groups who experience multiple forms of discrimination are not explicitly included in this political declaration. This means it is unlikely that their needs will be addressed.

This political declaration needed to address and recognise the full implementation of the human rights of women and girls as an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of all human rights and fundamental freedoms. With the upcoming agreements of the Sustainable Development Goals, this is essential to ensure that the needs of women and girls are integrated across all goals through a gender sensitive approach and with the inclusion of a stand-alone goal. This Declaration could have contributed to making this a reality within the post-2015 Development Agenda. Instead, this declaration does not provide women and girls with the voice that is needed for the realisation of gender equality.

It is no secret that there are significant gaps between ratification and implementation. But without ratification, implementation becomes significantly more difficult. At this CSW, because of the push back on already agreed language, future policy action and programmes that promote gender equality will be even harder to develop and implement. Too many Governments are hiding from their agreed responsibilities to women, which are not just contained in The Beijing Platform for Action and CEDAW, but in all international human rights legislation and treaties. The rights of women should not be controversial. Legislation and treaties that can protect and empower all women and girls, and help them access their human rights, already exist. What must happen is their full implementation. Action is demanded and required. Principles of equality should not be aspirational.

Twenty years since the agreement of the Beijing Platform for Action, not only should we have seen more progress towards achieving gender equality, but we should not still have to say that "women's rights are human rights".