THE TIME IS UP TO DELIVER ON WOMEN’S AND GIRLS’ RIGHTS

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On 9 March, Member States gathered at the 64th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW64) in New York, to mark the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA). Due to the global circumstances surrounding COVID-19, the full CSW64 session scheduled from 9-20 March was postponed, and in its place a short procedural meeting was held on 9 March to adopt a Political Declaration.

Amnesty International welcomes the Political Declaration reaffirming the BPfA and its follow up reviews. The reality remains that despite some significant gains in women’s human rights in the past decades, States are far from meeting their BPfA commitments, and we rather witness a growing backlash against gender equality and women’s human rights. There is an urgent need for States to put in place timely and adequate measures to protect gains and progress made so far and respond to ongoing gaps, emerging challenges and backlash in some critical areas of concern.

Realizing Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) for all.

During the 25 years since the BPfA, substantial progress has been made in defining sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) in international human rights law and in consensus documents. However, at the same time the backlash against SRHR by anti-rights groups, movements and some governments has increased and intensified.

Achieving gender equality and women’s empowerment is impossible without fully respecting, protecting and fulfilling sexual and reproductive health and rights of all women and girls, and people of all genders or no gender. Therefore, Amnesty International regrets the lack of any explicit reference to sexual and reproductive health and rights in the Political Declaration and calls on States to ensure that their national action plans related to the implementation of the BPfA, Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) include and guarantee the implementation of SRHR for all women and girls, and gender non-conforming people, without any discrimination or barriers.

Defending civil society space and recognizing and protecting Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs).

Amnesty International is pleased that the Commission acknowledged and welcomed contributions made by civil society, including non-governmental organizations and women’s and community-based organizations, youth-led organizations, and all other stakeholders.

Amnesty International regrets that there is no explicit reference to Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) in the Political Declaration. WHRDs are key players in the advancement of human rights, including furthering the implementation of BPfA, however, they are being attacked because of who they are and because of the human rights they defend. Amnesty International urgently calls on all States to ensure a safe and enabling environment in which civil society organizations and WHRDs, collectively or individually, are effectively protected and able to defend and promote human rights free from violence and discrimination, and without fear of punishment, reprisal or intimidation.

Ensuring adequate financing and accountability for gender equality.
The lack of financing has consistently been identified as one of the biggest impediments to achieving gender equality. While the Political Declaration pledges adequate financing for gender equality, Amnesty International calls on States to put into place mechanisms to track and make public allocations for gender equality to strengthen transparency and accountability.

Addressing the climate crisis by putting human rights at the centre.

Amnesty International commends the Commission for recognizing the importance of mainstreaming a gender perspective into environmental, climate change and disaster risk reduction policies, and recognizing the disproportionate effect of climate change and natural disasters on women and girls, in particular those in vulnerable situations. However, the Political Declaration fails to acknowledge the pressing nature of the climate crisis. Amnesty International calls on all States to take the most ambitious measures possible to reduce greenhouse emissions within the shortest possible timeframe, so as to limit the increase in global average temperatures below 1.5°C. Amnesty International also calls on all States to ensure that the transition towards a zero-carbon economy reduces inequalities, combats multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, promotes gender and intergenerational justice and fulfils human rights.

Ensuring that the Beijing+25 review process is inclusive and doesn’t leave anyone behind.

The postponement of CSW64 has meant a missed opportunity for a detailed review of the ongoing and newly emerging challenges and gaps in BFPA implementation, with the full and meaningful participation of civil society from across the world. When CSW64 is rescheduled, and in the lead up to the Generation Equality Forums in Mexico and France, it is critical that all voices are heard, and the rights of all women and girls, in all their diversity, are taken into account, including those belonging to some of the most marginalised communities in the world.

Transgender and gender non-conforming people continue to face violence, exclusion and discrimination perpetrated on the basis of real or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics. Globally, the voices of sex workers are frequently obscured or silenced because of the marginalization they experience, despite the fact that they are best placed to help define the most appropriate mechanisms to maximize their own welfare and safety.

Unfortunately, there have been specific efforts to exclude and undermine the participation of sex workers and transgender and gender non-conforming people in the Beijing+25 review and related UN processes. Amnesty International calls on all States, UN and civil society partners to ensure that sex workers and transgender and gender non-conforming people are adequately included in the Beijing+25 review process, their agency, dignity and human rights respected and that they are enabled to participate and voice their own views, perspectives and experiences.

The Beijing +25 review process must remain accessible and transparent for all and ensure that women and girls, and gender non-conforming people, particularly those who are marginalised, stigmatised and often targeted by discriminatory laws, have a safe space to speak for themselves and their communities.