

# Amnesty International

## Public Statement

24 March 2014

### **CSW58: Women and Girls hold key to a successful post-2015 development agenda**

Sustainable development will only be possible if women and girls' human rights are respected, protected and fulfilled, and gender equality and empowerment is achieved — that is the clear message of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) at the end of its 58<sup>th</sup> session in New York on 22 March.

The Commission spent the past two weeks reflecting on "Challenges and Achievements in the Implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) for Women and Girls." Drawing on lessons learned from the MDGs, the Commission called for a standalone goal on gender equality to be included in the next set of development goals, which is to follow the MDGs after they reach their target date in 2015. The agreed conclusions come at a time when States are busy negotiating a new set of Sustainable Development Goals.

Amnesty International welcomes the commitment to a standalone goal on gender equality and to tackle remaining critical challenges faced by women and girls to develop their full potential. The Commission has sent a strong signal recognising that women and girls are agents for development. Amnesty International calls on all States to follow through on the Commission's recommendations, and to ensure that substantive gender equality is included as a standalone goal and is integrated across all other goals, targets and indicators of the future post-2015 development framework.

Amnesty International recalls that progress has been uneven on implementing the MDGs, which have failed to ensure that development efforts address structural inequality and discrimination on gender and other grounds. The lack of alignment between the MDGs and existing human rights obligations related to women's rights and gender issues has meant they have largely failed to lead to improvements for women and girls. The new development framework must have human rights at the center, so that no one is left behind.

### **Women and girl's human rights are not up for negotiation**

States reached consensus only after negotiations that lasted into the early morning on the final three days of the Commission's session. Thousands of advocates from civil society organisations had gathered in New York to call for a strong commitment from States. Many expressed frustration that rights-based language agreed since the 1990s — in the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action in 1993, the International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action in Cairo in 1994, and the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, and as reaffirmed at respective review conferences — was still under debate.

A small minority of conservative governments spurred on by the Holy See held up negotiations by objecting to concepts as fundamental as gender and the human rights of women throughout the two weeks of deliberations.

Amnesty International welcomes the stance taken by many UN Member States to hold the line on existing obligations and commitments related to women and girls' sexual and reproductive health and rights — there can be no going back on these important landmark documents. We urge States to stand up for the rights of all individuals to live free from violence or discrimination on any grounds, including sexual orientation or gender identity.

Amnesty International welcomes the Commission's recognition of the important and legitimate role of women human rights defenders. Member States are urged to create an enabling environment so that defenders can carry out their work in all parts of the world, free from threats, intimidation or violence.

Member States must hear the voices of women and girls, as they share their experiences of lived realities and measures needed to improve their situation, in line with States' human rights obligations and commitments. Amnesty International welcomes the Commission's call for the effective participation of women, youth and other relevant civil society organizations in the design, continued implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies to achieve the MDGs, and to take into account their views in the elaboration of the post-2015 development agenda.

Amnesty International will continue to campaign for women and girls' human rights, at a time when strong leadership on women and girls' rights and empowerment are urgently needed from world leaders - both at the United Nations and in implementing these commitments around the world.

### **Background information**

In the agreed conclusions, Member States recognized that progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals - which include eradicating poverty and expanding access to health services such as reproductive health - has been held back due to persistent "unequal power relations between women and men," particularly discriminatory laws, social norms, and gender stereotypes.

The Commission expressed concern that several critical issues related to gender equality were not adequately addressed by the MDGs, including violence against women and girls; harmful practices such as early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation; women's and adolescents' sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights; women's and girls' disproportionate share of unpaid work, particularly unpaid care work; the gender wage gap; women's equal access to and control of resources including land; women's inheritance rights; accountability for violations of human rights of women and girls, and women's full participation in decision-making at all levels. The Commission called for measures to ensure universal access to primary education, especially for girls and vulnerable youth, as well as measures to strengthen the ability of women to participate in formal and informal labor sectors.

The Commission called on Member States to publically acknowledge the important and legitimate role of women human rights defenders in the promotion and protection of human rights, democracy, the rule of law and development and take appropriate, robust and practical steps to protect them.

Amnesty International joined others in advocating for the rights of women and girls at CSW, including on the key points raised in our written statement, available here:

[http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=E/CN.6/2014/NGO/7](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=E/CN.6/2014/NGO/7)