



Socialist International Women

SOCIALIST INTERNATIONAL WOMEN

International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women 2021

DECLARATION

This year's International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women is an opportunity to strongly remind our global community of the unacceptable levels of violence women and girls are suffering every single day, in every region around the world. It is also a day to reiterate that the responsibility for change rests with all of us. Whether we are active within governments and communities, or individuals within our private lives, we all have vital roles to play in calling out all forms of misogyny and gender based injustice and explicitly rejecting violence against women in all its forms.

The continuing social and economic pressure of the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted several long-standing gender based inequalities and injustices, which contribute to the distressing prevalence of violence against women. On-going issues such as violations of women's basic human rights, severe wage inequalities and gender based restrictions on women's education all feed into damaging ideologies where women are viewed as less valuable than men. Gender based violence is the result of misogynistic attitudes towards women, women's low status within many societies and a corresponding lack of social, economic and legal protections. It is these factors that must change urgently to ensure that women and girls experience meaningful gender equality in their daily lives.

Globally the devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is far from over and is continuing to have a disproportionately negative effect on the safety and wellbeing of women. Violence against women has increased across all regions at a time when funding and resources for victims remain severely stretched. Dubbed the 'shadow pandemic' this rise in violence is partly due to vastly increased numbers of women being isolated at home and impoverished through loss of income. In some regions as many as one in five women have lost their job during the pandemic and some have been forced to give up jobs due to increased carer duties at home. To make matters worse, women isolated at home may have reduced access to support and a decreased ability to flee dangerous or oppressive environments. These factors can leave women entirely dependent on others for financial support and force some to take greater risks to earn for themselves or attempt to escape violence at home.

There are also on-going political issues and civil conflicts in some regions, which have been continuously affecting the safety and wellbeing of women and girls resulting in clear violations of their human rights and freedoms. In some areas we are witnessing a new wave of denial of female education and the closure of schools for girls as well as an increasing number of very young girls being forced into marriage and a lifetime of abuse and subservience to men. Women continue to suffer rape, humiliation and violence in the chaos of civil wars and acts of terrorism while being exposed to hunger, thirst and disease within environments where infrastructure such as health centres and social support structures have been destroyed, or hijacked by aggressive forces. There is also the deeply distressing suffering of women who are escaping conflict and persecution while desperately trying to protect their children. Some of these women are entirely defenceless due to

their husbands and male relatives being absent or killed in conflicts, which leaves them exposed to the most distressing forms of deprivation, violence and abuse.

Sadly, all these factors combined are devastating blows for millions of women that require an urgent, compassionate response from our governments and communities. Although in some regions there have been positive reactions which are genuinely helping women, overall the response has just not been good enough, which means women are continuing to struggle and suffer without hope of support. Unfortunately, patriarchal systems of leadership and governance have proven time and again that they will ignore or resist gender relevant issues for as long as they can get away with it. Therefore, women must continue to stand together in solidarity to push the gender equality agenda and insist on gender sensitive responses backed up by actual cash funding and tangible resources.

In the middle of everything, however, there are also some encouraging green shoots, which Socialist International Women warmly applauds. For example, there are several initiatives that are working to educate men and boys about the value and contribution of women, such as the UN Women collaboration The Spotlight Initiative. Projects like these are essential in helping to re-write the narrative of women's place within society and influence the attitudes and behaviours of men towards women and girls. In support of this goal, it is critical that women are regularly seen as powerful agents of change in our current global crisis. It is vital that women are significantly involved in the COVID-19 recovery planning for our communities and nations. This is even more important right now because there is a worrying trend of erosion of democracy in several regions and a number of distressing incidents of toxic backlash towards even the idea of female power.

Sadly, so far it is evident that women's influence on our future is not yet anywhere near where it needs to be. Recent data shows that out of 225 COVID-19 taskforces worldwide, 85 per cent were dominated by men and in 24 countries no women at all were involved. In solidarity, we must continue to insist that women take their rightful place in such discussions and exert the influence they deserve on issues that directly affect women's health, safety, prosperity and wellbeing.

Socialist International Women maintains that to end violence against women we must all continue to stand together in solidarity and remain firm in our resolve to strive for the necessary changes in the hearts and minds of our local communities, wider societies and governments. Gender equality is fundamental to ending violence against women and essential for building peaceful, sustainable, socially democratic communities and nations for our children, our grandchildren and ourselves.

