

28 February 2019

UN Human Rights Council 40th session (25 February – 22 March 2019)

Item 3. Clustered interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the right to food and the Independent Expert on the effects of foreign debt and other related international financial obligations of States on the full enjoyment of all human rights

The Bretton Woods Project supports this statement. We support the Independent Expert on Foreign Debt's call on **Ukraine** to take concrete steps to ensure that the burden of the economic crisis does not fall on the most disenfranchised and does not exacerbate pre-existing inequalities. We agree with his assessment that fiscal consolidation required by the IMF has included measures that disproportionately impact on women's human rights. These are concerns that WILPF has repeatedly brought to the attention of Human Rights Council members and observers.¹ Violations of women's human rights resulting from the implementation of austerity measures have contributed to the feminisation of poverty and the deepening of gender inequalities in Ukraine. They also pose significant obstacles to women's meaningful participation in peace efforts.

We congratulate the Independent Expert on his work in illustrating the key role of human rights in economic policy making and the impact of a failure to do so. We welcome his "**Guiding Principles on human rights impact assessments of economic reforms,**" particularly their focus on combating multiple and intersectional discrimination and ensuring substantive gender equality.² We call on all states to support a strong endorsement by the Human Rights Council of the Guiding Principles and to operationalise them at the national level.

Neo liberalism and the consequent austerity policies have been elevated to the status of law: the laws of the free market. They are not. They are policy choices made to sustain a system of globalisation that increasingly depends on inequality, exploitation, upheld by legal regimes that protect corporate interests, and fail to uphold and protect human rights. This has to change.

Inequality, particularly gender inequality and the concomitant violence against women, exclusion from participation in governance structures and independent economic activity, is a fault line in social coherence and a major contributing factor in violent conflict. Neo liberalism needs militarism to secure the system. Militarisation and corporate greed fuel arms trading and the squandering of valuable resources on weaponry and hard security instead of making financing available for the realisation of human rights, particularly economic, social and cultural rights, and, indeed, the attainment of the SDGs.

Human rights impact assessments restore the focus on the reality of people's lives and how economic policies can be reframed so as to address inequalities, poverty and exploitation. Human rights law demands nothing less.

¹ See, for example, 'Ukraine: the impact of interventions by International Financial Institutions on women', WILPF Written statement to the 35th regular session of the UN Human Rights Council (June 2017) https://wilpf.org/wilpf_statements/ukraine-the-impact-of-interventions-by-international-financial-institutions-on-women/ and 'Upcoming UPR of Ukraine: States should address the impact of austerity measures on women', WILPF oral statement at the UN Human Rights Council 35th session (June 2017) https://wilpf.org/wilpf_statements/ukraine-the-council-needs-to-address-the-impact-of-austerity-measures-on-women/.

² **Principle 7 – Equality and combating multiple and intersectional discrimination.** Economic reform policies and measures must not be discriminatory, and they must endeavour to ensure equality and non-discrimination for all. For this purpose, the directly and indirectly discriminatory impact of economic reform policies on the most disenfranchised or marginalized individuals has to be assessed, and alternative measures evaluated.

As part of the requirement to prevent economic reforms from having discriminatory impacts, human rights impact assessments should seek to identify and address the potential and cumulative impacts of measures on specific individuals and groups and protect them from such impacts. In doing so, it should be borne in mind that women are particularly exposed to multiple and intersectional discrimination. Direct, indirect, multiple and intersectional discrimination – particularly for disenfranchised or marginalized groups within society – needs to be carefully assessed and prevented.

Principle 8 – Non-discrimination based on gender and substantive gender equality. Economic reforms should prevent any kind of direct and indirect form of discrimination based on gender, in law or practice, and should promote substantive and transformative gender equality. Human rights impact assessments should always include a comprehensive gender analysis.