Facilitation of Visas for Women Activists to Enjoy Their Right to Participate in International Meetings

Preamble

Recalling that the right of women and girls to participate in public and political life is enshrined in human rights treaties, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child;

Recalling also that governments have made strong commitments to ensure the full participation of women and girls in public and political life in instruments such as the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs);

Recalling also that the participation of women in decision-making bodies is one of the four pillars of United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1325 and its subsequent related resolutions (the Women, Peace and Security agenda), and that UNSC Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security urges states to consider ways to increase the inclusive representation of youth in the decision-making bodies at all levels in local, national, regional and international institutions and mechanisms for the prevention and resolution of conflict;

Recalling further that with the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders\(^1\) UN member states have committed themselves to ensuring that human rights defenders can seek the protection and realisation of human rights at the national and international levels, and that the UN General Assembly, in its resolution 68/181 on women human rights defenders, has acknowledged that women of all ages who engage in the promotion and protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms and all people who engage in the defence of the rights of women and gender equality,

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\(^1\) S3/144. Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms

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individually and in association with others, play an important role, at the local, national, regional and international levels, in the promotion and protection of human rights;

_Noting with grave concern_ that the low representation of women, including young women, in decision-making processes is a challenge in most countries around the world. Indeed, many African women activists and women activists from other regions, including the Middle East and Northern Africa (MENA), Eastern Europe, Central Asia, South Asia, and Central and South America, face structural barriers that limit their ability and opportunity to travel to meetings they wish to attend, including international meetings concerning their own countries. The refusal to issue visas by certain embassies, very often of Western countries, is a recurrent obstacle to their participation. In addition, women activists from countries in conflict, from contexts where civil society is repressed, and from contexts where women face patriarchal exclusion and mobility restrictions, as well as women activists from groups in situations of marginalisation (e.g., women with disabilities, asylum seeking, refugee and migrant women, internally displaced women, Indigenous women, women belonging to minorities), face increased obstacles in exercising their right to participation.

_Underlining_ that some WILPF members have repeatedly been denied visas by several European embassies under the pretext that "there is no guarantee of return". In some contexts, such as Afghanistan, they have had to travel to neighbouring countries in order to even apply for a visa for a third country, something that entails additional costs, even higher when they are not allowed to travel without being accompanied by a male family member, and potential exposure to security risks during travel. The unreasonable states’ practice of requiring people to travel outside of their own countries to submit a visa application also contributes to environmental damage. Furthermore, the requirements for financial guarantees (e.g., proof of sufficient financial means) create disproportionate obstacles for women activists, who often face gender-based discrimination in the economic sphere, for instance regarding the right to work, to own property or to have a bank account. WILPF is aware that Syrian feminists and women human rights defenders operating from neighbouring countries, such as Turkey, Jordan or Lebanon, face compounded administrative challenges related to their status, and Syrian women in areas outside regime-controlled areas face administrative hurdles in providing ‘valid’ identification papers as these are issued from de-facto authorities and affiliated institutions that are not considered legitimate by the regime or by any other country.

_Noting_ that conversely, women from Western countries are easily and regularly issued visas for meetings in Africa and more generally in countries of the Global South. These practices are indicative of a legacy of colonial and racist history in the migration policies of many states. This reality is akin to discrimination and marginalisation of women from the Global South and other non-Western countries, and in particular African women, and infringes on their right to participate in international meetings in person. They should be able to make their voices heard, share their experiences, expertise and good practices, but also have the possibility to benefit from physical contact with the rest of the world and to enjoy the opening of other opportunities. This is particularly important as in many contexts women activists do not fully enjoy their human rights to freedom of expression and

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freedom of peaceful assembly and association, and to participate in political and public life at the national level.

Recalling that WILPF is an organisation that works for the advancement of women's rights worldwide, social justice, equal opportunities, and against discrimination. WILPF's mission includes the promotion of the implementation of international instruments such as CEDAW and the implementation of all four pillars of UNSCR 1325 and subsequent related resolutions, including the participation pillar, which reiterates the right for women to be present at decision-making tables, to participate in decision-making that affects them, and to influence policies through their presence and actions.

Underlining in this regard that the recurrent denial of visas to women activists from the Global South and other non-Western countries for meetings organised by WILPF or by other partners at the international level or for meetings of the United Nations (UN) or other international organisations, constitutes a considerable obstacle to their enjoyment of their right to participation.

It is important for WILPF to fight against any system of exclusion. That is why the 33rd International Congress of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, meeting from 16 to 24 July 2022, adopts this resolution and makes the following recommendations:

Recommendations

- WILPF calls on all countries and in particular Western countries to implement their obligations and commitments under instruments such as CEDAW, the SDGs and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, as well as UNSC Resolution 1325 and UNSC Resolution 2250, the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, the UN General Assembly resolution 68/181 on women human rights defenders, by facilitating the participation of women peace activists and other women human rights defenders in international meetings through ensuring that their embassies, including those in Africa, issue them visas for travel to their territory and that no travel to a third country is required in order to submit a visa application;
- WILPF also calls on all countries, and in particular on Western countries that have adopted feminist foreign policies (FFP), national action plans to implement UNSC resolution 1325, and policies on the protection of human rights defenders, to duly integrate in such policies actions to ensure fair, transparent and gender-responsive visa regulations and policies, as well as support measures, including funding, to guarantee access and the effective participation of peace activists and other women human rights defenders in international fora;
- WILPF Sections invite the WILPF International Secretariat to identify ways to further support visa facilitation for WILPF members and more generally advocacy actions to support their participation, including in international meetings;
- WILPF encourages all WILPF members around the world, particularly those in Western countries, to support, where they can, the process of obtaining visas for WILPF members and more generally to undertake advocacy to support their participation in order to maximise the opportunities for participation for all.

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