

Creating an International Gender and Peace Agenda: Transnational Companies, Weapons and VAW

For the 64th session of the CEDAW committee, France is going to be reviewed. WILPF issued a report on the violations by France of women's human rights.

We wish have raised three topics, two of which are linked to the extraterritorial obligations of States to avoid causing harm and to protect women's rights extraterritorially, as recognised by this Committee in its General Recommendation 28.

Impact of France's arms transfers on gender-based violence

The first issue concerns French arms transfers. WILPF considers that continued French arms transfers, such as the sales to Mali, Morocco and to Saudi Arabia, amongst other States. These countries present serious violations of women's human rights. Arms transfers risk having direct consequences for women and girls and contravene General Recommendation 30 made by this Committee. We find that this is a consequence of current regulations and mechanisms lacking in transparency and efficiency.

We urge the French Government to ensure rigorous, transparent and gender sensitive risk assessments are conducted, by adopting binding national regulations to this effect, developed in full consultation with civil society organisations, in order to fully implement France's obligations under CEDAW, General Recommendation 30 and the UN Arms Trade Treaty. We also call on the French Government to withdraw authorisation of any arms sales or transfers when there is a risk that they would be used to commit or facilitate acts of gender based violence against women, or where there are widespread or serious violations of women's human rights, including acts of gender-based violence. France should stop completely all transfers to States that are in violation of the CEDAW Convention, such as Saudi Arabia.

Impact of French transnational companies operating in the textile industry in South East Asia

Our second topic of attention is the issue of activities of French transnational companies in the textile industry in Bangladesh where various violations of women's workers rights persist. Indeed, despite good will commitments from multinational companies to improve safety in its manufacturers' factory after the Rana Plaza disaster, the reality is that most workers (the majority of which are women) are still at risk in their daily work. The law on Due Diligence, drafted in 2015, still has not been accepted. We welcome the French initiative on such a law, and we urge the French Government:

- To reinforce the law on Due Diligence by adding a gender perspective and specific measures for women,
- For the French Senate to ratify this law on Due Diligence,

- To ensure that French companies comply with human rights obligations to ensure safe and decent working conditions throughout their supply chains within and outside of France,
- To bind French companies to conduct to call in neutral experts to investigate, conduct and write reports on extraterritorial activities and on the supply chain,
- To ensure that French companies active in the textile industry take into account a gender perspective, in order to assess specific risks of women's rights violations under CEDAW and of exploitation of women workers throughout their supply chains,
- To actively engage in the open-ended intergovernmental working group on transnational corporations and other business enterprises with respect to human rights with a view to adopting an international legally binding instrument to regulate, in international human rights law, the activities of transnational corporations and other business enterprises in accordance with resolution 26/9 of the Human Rights Council

Impact of French nuclear testing in French Polynesia

Finally, we want to draw attention on the French nuclear testing for more than 30 years in French Polynesia. Through the whole duration of the tests, the French government has maintained that there were no effects on health. There is still a taboo on the consequences today, even though France has recognised the dangerous effects on health since 1998. Women are more subject to radiations and therefore to nuclear testing than men, hence the gender impact of the testing must be assessed.

We urge France to present formal and unambiguous excuses to French Polynesians, and to conduct rigorous, transparent and gendered impact assessment of nuclear testing on citizens' health, and more specifically on women's health. We also call on the French government to take the population from persisting effects of the nuclear tests and to compensate victims accordingly, particularly women.