



October 2024

CSW69 Statement

Nearly 30 years ago, galvanised by feminist and women's leadership and activism, political leaders recognised the role of women and armed conflict in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. The Beijing Platform identified some of the structural factors behind why armed conflicts happen, who is fueling them and who they impact most. Importantly, it signaled that fundamental structural changes are essential to make peace and protect women's rights in contexts of armed conflict, war and foreign occupation.

In 1995, the Beijing Platform called on world leaders to move away from spending resources on increasingly larger militaries and its related industries and toward peace and development and to address the role of military expenditures on the health of their societies. The Beijing Platform recognised that military spending, disarmament, foreign occupation and self-determination, are all women's rights issues. It also recognised that to bring about peace, feminist movements have key roles to play and that gender approaches must be incorporated. And it underscored that the only way forward is to resolve conflicts through peaceful and nonviolent means.

But the reality today is a stark betrayal of women and a betrayal of the millions of people around the world who are being increasingly subjected to horrific realities of war and structural violence, inclusive of socioeconomic violence. Unchecked and rising militarism, human rights violations, and lack of accountability continue to directly undermine the achievement of women's rights, a livable planet and sustainable peace. Militarism, colonialism and racism continue to contribute to protracted conflicts. And these systems of oppression continue to divert essential resources away from social services and structures that sustain life.

In 2024, in contrast, world leaders are spending record levels on militaries and weapons. Global military spending surpassed 2.4 trillion United States Dollars in 2023. Feminists continue to expose the idea that weapons can ever provide security. Rather, military spending – not its volume or level, but rather the absolute nature of it, the roots of it and the consequences it has had for ordering our societies and international relations has thus far condemned us to live within systems of violence and exploitation.

Such levels of spending have directly fueled armed conflicts around the world, leading to detrimental impacts on health, increased poverty, ecological destruction and forced displacement. In 1995, the Beijing Platform called for providing protection and assistance to refugee and displaced women. It reaffirmed the right of self-determination of all peoples, in particular of peoples under colonial domination or foreign occupation. It recognised that some armed conflicts have their origins in colonialism and conquest, and the perpetuation of colonialism through state and military repression. In 2024, in contexts including Palestine and Ukraine, entire communities, and multiple generations are being targeted by indiscriminate

bombing by well-armed aggressors who hold little respect for human rights or international law, while women and girls, including in Afghanistan and Iran, are living under repression and violations that impact every aspect of their daily lives.

The contrast between these obligations set 30 years ago and the reality today demonstrates the gap between the commitments of world leaders and their actions toward women and girls. This is evident in many examples where structural violence, human rights violations, and conflict has increased in the past three decades, with severe and disproportionate impacts on women and marginalized groups. Only one after the Beijing Conference, the Taliban first took power in Afghanistan and instituted a brutal regime of oppression that denied basic rights to women and girls. The Taliban was ousted in an invasion that subsequently fueled decades of war, killing hundreds of thousands of people. Today, the Taliban is back in power and has reinstated a systematic and increasingly repressive set of laws, practices and policies that constitute gender persecution and apartheid.

For the past few years, Russia has been engaged in a full-on invasion of Ukraine, building on its prior invasions, occupation and aggression. Ukraine is now the most mine-affected country in the world, and at the current rate it would take hundreds of years to clear the country of landmines.

As of October 2024, it has been one year of genocide perpetrated by Israel against Palestinians, particularly in Gaza. Hundreds of thousands of people have been killed or injured, and over half of Gaza has been destroyed. But this did not start in a vacuum, and is occurring within a wider context of occupation, apartheid, blockade and relentless settlement expansion in recent years. This genocide is being fueled by weapons, political support, and aid from countries that claim to defend women's rights and human rights.

Furthermore, while there has been progress on women's rights over the past 30 years there are also risks of severe regression. Legal and normative frameworks on sexual and reproductive health and rights have been strengthened in many countries. Some countries have also recognised the rights of lesbian, gay, transgender, gender non-conforming, and other people of diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions, and sex characteristics. But rising right-wing and so-called anti-gender actors are severely threatening this progress, coopting women's rights language and putting the work of feminist and queer movements at risk.

The relevance of gender and women's rights to peace and security has been further enshrined in UN Security Council resolutions on Women, Peace and Security. Since 2000, the Security Council has adopted ten resolutions that detail concrete actions to promote women's participation at all levels and stages of peace and security; address sexual violence in conflict; and support the incorporation of gender perspectives and expertise in peace processes. Over 100 governments have adopted national plans on women, peace and security. Several governments have also made commitments to pursue what they refer to as feminist foreign policies.

However, governments often fail to recognize the connection between arms export and the continuum of violence to which they contribute to women, girls and other marginalised groups

are subjected to, or the connections between unfair trade deals and poverty levels among women and girls.

The fundamental incentive structures and conflicts of interest – present in the very bodies of the UN that are tasked with maintaining peace and security – have not changed. The patriarchal and colonial underpinnings of the world order have not changed.

The solutions are therefore also clear. It is essential to address colonialism, imperialism, and capitalism as intersecting systems of oppression. Accountability for all actors who violate women's rights and perpetuate violence is paramount. And it has never been more urgent to commit to conflict prevention and nonviolent conflict resolution. What is missing is actionable commitments through structural shifts by powerful actors to build the systems that will serve the needs and interests of all people, rather than those of an elite few.

The dominant militaristic narrative is only one perspective – not the only perspective. It is clear from the past 30 years that militarism has not made women safer, has not achieved our rights, and has not brought about peace and security. States must heed the calls of feminist peace movements who have developed the visions needed to secure our collective future.