

To: H.E. UN Secretary General, Mr. António Guterres

CC: H.E. Mr. Vojislav ŠUC, President of the Human Rights Council  
H.E. Ms. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, President of the UN Women Executive Board

Subject: Members of the European Parliament call on the UN to uphold Women's Rights

*Dear Secretary General:*

*Tomorrow, 8th of March, is the world International Women's Day celebration. The undersigning Members of the European Parliament would like to take advantage of this occasion to raise your awareness on the global situation of women and the limited effectiveness of the current international legal framework.*

*In the twenty-first century, women keep on bearing with all types of discrimination based not only on social and cultural practices, but also on national and international legal frameworks. These frameworks lack the most elemental gender dimension and are recurrently oblivious of women's specific needs.*

*Violence against women is manifested through a wide variety of physical, sexual and psychological forms: sexual violence and harassment both in the public and domestic spheres, in the framework of human trafficking, or at the centre of cultural traditions such as female genital mutilation or forced marriage -these representing some of the most ruthless cases.*

*The data is terrifying. According to UN Women, one out of every three women have suffered some type of violence in the private sphere; over 140 million women have no access to public family planning services; 133 million women, essentially girls, have been subjected to female genital mutilation. We could fill hundreds of pages with the distinct situations of inequality, exploitation and injustices that we women, half of humanity, face on a daily basis.*

*We acknowledge the efforts of the United Nations in progressing towards greater gender equality by means of agreements such as the Beijing Declaration, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), or the creation of UN Women. They have all contributed to improving the current situation of women throughout the globe, although there is still a lot to be done to accomplish real and full equality.*

*During the 4th World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, it was explicitly reaffirmed that women's rights are human rights. However, the evolution of global awareness on women's rights has still not been reflected in the Charter of Rights. Out of the 189 CEDAW ratifying States, 60 have expressed reservations to articles aimed at consolidating women's fundamental rights by arguing "incompatibility with their religion and/or culture". This is not only unacceptable, but it also contravenes the 1969 Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties by voiding key articles for the righteous goal and end of the treaty.*

*There are currently 42 countries which do not recognise equality between women and men in their constitutions, relegating women to a subordinated role in relation to men. Furthermore, only 22% of parliamentary seats throughout the world are occupied by women, reflecting the huge gender gap in political decision making spaces at a global level.*

*The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is turning 70. It is a tremendously useful and effective tool to call on governments to develop the legal and material grounds necessary to fulfil all of the Fundamental Rights enshrined in the Declaration. In 1948, women continued representing the silenced and overshadowed majority in all of our societies. It is significant to recall that just one woman, Eleanor Roosevelt, took part in the drafting of the Declaration. 70 years on, we, committed and gender aware women throughout the world, demand our voices be heard within political decision making spaces on an equal footing with men. We demand that our specific rights be included in International Law at the same level as other Fundamental Rights.*

*For all of these reasons, we undersigning Members of the European Parliament demand:*

1. *A linguistic revision of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: We therefore wish to pick up on the request made by the Roosevelt Institute back in 2012, highlighting that "almost half of the articles (in the declaration) use the male pronouns 'him', 'he', 'himself' and/or 'his' as the generic terms to represent all of humanity".*

*"This initial gender bias in the declaration is historically understandable, but today needs to be addressed if we are truly committed to the full inclusion of women's rights in human rights."*

*"This linguistic adaptation will be of invaluable symbolic importance, as it recognises the efforts of those working for women's rights and truly reaffirms the United Nations' commitment to gender equity."*

2. *To broaden the Declaration of Human Rights. We don't call for a complete revision of the existing articles, but to only include the exclusive rights of women in the Declaration. These rights should become a de facto part of the highest ranking legal framework in international law. This Declaration will never truly achieve the rank of being universal until it enshrines the rights of the other half of the population.*

3. *We demand that all United Nations dependant organisms, with no exception, act in total coherence with the principles reflected in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Sustainable Development Goals and CEDAW.*

4. *We call on the ILO, WTO and the UN Human Rights Council, to design, to adequately finance and to implement instruments to guarantee the full exercise of our specific rights. The impact of each instrument should be specifically assessed in every policy field, preferably by UN Women. We demand total gender mainstreaming throughout the WTO's entire policy pallet as a means of mitigating the impact the effects of their policies on millions of women throughout the globe. We call on the ILO to deepen the debate on labour standards in order to address the problems faced by millions of women working in informal sectors of our globalised economy.*

5. *Lastly, we call on the UN Human Rights Council and UN Women to explicitly promote and support the ongoing United Nations process for the establishment of a Binding Treaty on Transnational Corporations and other Business Enterprises with respect to Human Rights. We consider this treaty as the only instrument capable of reverting the levels of impunity suffered by women when their rights as human beings, and specifically as women, are violated. Its positive impact on the lives of women -especially those living in rural areas and developing countries- will be of a considerable magnitude given the deterring effect such a legal instrument would generate on the behaviour of many companies.*

*We, women Members of the European Parliament, commit to work and defend Women's Rights within the sphere of our competences, and we sincerely hope you take this letter into due consideration.*

*Yours sincerely,*

***Lola Sánchez Caldentey***

*Member of the European Parliament, GUE/NGL*

**Vilija Blinkevičiūtė**

*Chair of the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality, S&D*

**Tania González Peñas**

*Member of the European Parliament, GUE/NGL*

**Marie-Christine Vergiat**

*Member of the European Parliament, GUE/NGL*

**Nessa Childers**

*Member of the European Parliament, S&D*

**Sabine Lösing**

*Member of the European Parliament, GUE/NGL*

**Izaskun Bilbao Barandica**

*Member of the European Parliament, ALDE*

**Catherine Stihler**

*Member of the European Parliament, S&D*

**Ana Miranda**

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**Marisa Matias**

*Member of the European Parliament, GUE/NGL*

**Merja Kyllönen**

*Member of the European Parliament, GUE/NGL*

**Theresa Griffin**

*Member of the European Parliament, S&D*

**Eleonora Forenza**

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*Member of the European Parliament, ALDE*

***Anja Hazenkamp***

*Member of the European Parliament, GUE/NGL*

***Linnéa Engström***

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*“Whether at home, on the streets or during war,  
violence against women and girls is **a human rights violation  
of pandemic proportions** that takes place in public and private spaces.”*

UN WOMEN