

**Oral Statement Of The Women Human Rights Defenders International Coalition For The 57th Session
Of The Commission On The Status Of Women**

The Women Human Rights Defenders International Coalition, an international group of human rights, women's rights and sexual and reproductive rights organizations, expresses its deep concern over the grave and escalating violence against women human rights defenders, who are targeted in the global South and North alike both because of their gender and their work in defense of all human rights.

In our Coalition, we assert that women human rights defenders are both women and also all people who defend gender-related rights. Many people in this room are women human rights defenders, many of us are at risk because of who we are and the rights we focus on. Women Human Rights Defenders are on the frontlines of the struggle to defend women and girls from violence, and are essential stakeholders in preventing and ending it.

We are exposed to gender-based violence and other human rights violations in both the private and public spheres, and our advocacy is challenged by police and family and community members alike. Women human rights defenders who work on sexual and reproductive rights are specifically targeted through harassment, stigma, discrimination, criminalization and physical violence. This is also true for defenders who are targeted because of their real or assumed identities as women, lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender people.

Justified through tradition, culture and customary practice, in contexts of militarization and conflict, fundamentalisms, heteronormativity and globalization, we are targets every day for a range of violations and violence. Our offices are raided, our organizations are shut down, our families are threatened and we are arrested or assaulted because of our advocacy and who we are seen to be.

Knowing the realities of these experiences, we would like to ask: how are all the governments gathered at this year's CSW fulfilling their obligations to protect, promote and fulfill the human rights of women who defend rights against state and non-state actor violations and to challenge impunity? In terms of your deliberations, you have an opportunity to make our experiences as defenders of human rights – and we do not mean only human rights of women - visible. We defend all rights, whether those related to food, land and water, or freedom from rape, or rights to peaceful protest or to make independent decisions about our families and reproduction.

Patriarchy and hetero-normativity lay the foundation for this systemic violence and the disturbing climate of impunity. These systems of oppression deny women human rights defenders' equality, relegate their lives and work to the private and non-monetized sphere, marginalize their contribution to society, and render many violations invisible or 'insignificant'. States too often do not prevent or punish

attacks against defenders, so we are denied support, protection and redress due to gender stereotyping and discrimination. As affirmed in the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, states have the obligation to guarantee environments that enable women to undertake their work in human rights defense. An enabling environment includes adequate material resources, ensuring those resources can be mobilized effectively, and ultimately ensuring the effective physical and psychological protection of Women human rights defenders. We therefore ask: what are the steps that you, states representative here today, going to take to create enabling environments for Women human rights defenders?

Women human rights defenders play an essential role in defending women and girls against violence and rights violations. Through our work, we challenge discriminatory norms and practices that enable gender-based violence and other violations at every level. We confront frameworks that silence women's voices, reject 'conventional' roles, and uphold the validity of women's independent choices, including our reproductive and sexual choices.

Women human rights defenders create space for the political participation of women at every level of society. Our right to participate in activities as members of civil society, including in the United Nations system, without fear of reprisals, coercion, intimidation or attacks must be guaranteed. We therefore, call on all governments to fulfill their obligations to support Women Human Rights Defenders including by guarantee their right to participation without fear of reprisals.

We call on member States to address the urgent need for effective and gender specific protection measures for Women human rights defenders, and to ensure prompt implementation. In addition, we call on you here, as you negotiate CSW outcomes, to show both gender sensitivity and the political will to recognize our experiences and the important contributions we make in the defense of human rights worldwide.

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