



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
11 December 2023

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women

Sixty-eighth session

11–22 March 2024

Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”

Statement submitted by Virginia Gildersleeve International Fund, Inc., a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

A Call to Action: Invest in Women and Trans-led Grassroots Action to advance Gender Equality and Economic Justice and Rights

Virginia Gildersleeve International Fund, now known as Women First International Fund, is proud to present this statement to the 68th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women.

Our mission is grounded in the recognition that expertise and solutions are found within the very communities that experience systemic oppression daily. Yet, a stark reality persists, where those most affected by inequality and injustice are often left behind and remain unheard and unseen in pivotal decision-making spaces. Their knowledge, solutions, and aspirations are often undermined, and significantly underfunded.

We stand in unwavering solidarity with women and trans people who, in the aftermath of crises, find themselves grappling with a loss of livelihoods, battling economic hardship without adequate social protection mechanisms, are frequently excluded from the negotiation table, and have no voice in decisions that directly impact their lives and communities and confronting insurmountable barriers to a life of liberty, equality, and dignity. We invest in young women and girls who are the leaders of today and tomorrow. We advocate for the social and economic rights of domestic workers and street vendors who organize themselves to challenge exploitative working conditions that are also rife with violence and harassment, and unfair wages. We support incarcerated women, girls, and trans individuals who face stigma and discrimination as they seek pathways to financial independence. We stand with single mothers in refugee camps, tirelessly striving to navigate social, economic, and legal barriers that hinder their access to income-generation opportunities.

Poverty and inequality remain daunting challenges for the foreseeable future with an additional 165 million people falling into poverty between 2020 and 2023, disproportionately impacting marginalized women, girls, and trans communities. In the face of numerous obstacles on the path to advancing economic justice and rights, we acknowledge the unbreakable resilience of women, girls, and trans people who raise their voices and create alternative futures, organize, and advocate for systemic change, and lead organizations and movements towards a just and equitable world.

These grassroots organizations, particularly those led by women and trans activists, serve as the unsung heroes ensuring that those left behind are not forgotten. Their deep understanding of the complex challenges faced by marginalized individuals is informed by lived experiences, making their solutions more relevant and impactful. However, despite their potential, these organizations often lack access to the necessary resources and decision-making power to enact meaningful change. The underfunding of these grassroots movements impedes their ability to address systemic barriers and uplift historically oppressed communities.

Women First International Fund calls upon all stakeholders to commit to substantially increasing investments in these women and trans-led endeavours.

Key Recommendations

Center Community-Led Solutions for Gender Equality:

- Recognize that credible, lasting solutions for gender equality and economic justice emerge where community-led organizations operate, as they are deeply embedded in their local contexts and committed to overcoming systemic barriers to inequality.

- Collaborate with women and trans-led organizations to address the root causes of inequality and injustice, as they hold vital insights, solutions, and networks needed to effectively challenge poverty and oppression.
- Embrace a holistic, people-centered, intersectional approach to identifying and investing in community-led solutions for a gender-equal world.

Finance with a Gender Perspective:

- Allocate resources to grassroots groups led by women and trans individuals, ensuring these resources reach them.
- Focus on underfunded, small, emerging organizations with annual budgets of less than \$50,000.
- Recognize that those directly affected by gender-based oppression and economic exploitation should be central to shaping solutions and decisions.
- Listen to those closest to the problem and center the voices and networks of under-resourced gender justice movements

Support Diverse Institutional Strengthening Needs:

- Reject a one-size-fits-all approach to strengthening women and trans-led grassroots groups.
- Tailor capacity-strengthening and organizational resilience support to the diverse needs of community-led organizations.
- Provide flexible, multi-year, unrestricted funding to gender justice organizations so that local expertise plays a central role in decision-making processes regarding resource allocation, definitions of economic and gender justice, and, consequently, determining which institutional strengthening needs must be prioritized.
- Challenge standardized definitions of success and prioritize context-specific measures of impact based on for example, gender-disaggregated data, and/or what is most important to those leading change in their communities.
- Implement Gender-Sensitive Budgeting Practices at the National Level to ensure that women and trans-led grassroots organizations have systemic support through legal, social, and economic frameworks that equip them to effectively advance gender equality within their communities.

Poverty and inequality will persist unless we shift both resources and decision-making power to the organizations and movements dedicated to advancing economic justice and gender equality within their communities.

Women First International Fund calls for a unified commitment from local, national, and global governments, foundations, and corporations to intentionally increase investment in women and trans-led grassroots action. We call on you to join us in this critical endeavor, to center the voices of the unheard and unseen, to celebrate diversity and local expertise, and to strengthen the resilience of grassroots movements and organizations. Together, let us reject the status quo that consistently underfunds and overlooks the transformative power of investing in feminist action led by those closest to the problem. Instead, let us work towards a world designed for everyone to thrive, a world where gender equality and economic justice and rights are not just aspirations, but the realities that transform the everyday experiences of those living and leading along the margins of an unequal world.