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Women's Progress Toward Gender Equality is Lagging, UN Warns, Hard-Fought Gains Under Threat

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BRIDGETOWN, Barbados, CMC – A new United Nations report is warning that progress made towards gender equality is lagging and hard-fought gains are under threat as the international community gears up to observe International Women’s Day on Sunday.

The report, titled “Women’s Rights in Review 25 years after Beijing” and launched by UN Women provides a comprehensive stock-take on the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, which remains the most comprehensive agenda for gender equality ever agreed.

The report finds that progress towards gender equality is faltering and hard-won advances are being reversed. Rampant inequality, the climate emergency, conflict and the alarming rise of exclusionary politics all threaten future progress towards gender equality.

The report flags the lack of effective action to boost women's representation at the tables of power and warns that the vision of the Beijing Platform for Action will never be realized if the most excluded women and girls are not acknowledged and prioritized.

"The review of women's rights shows that, despite some progress, no country has achieved gender equality. Equality isn't just one quarter of the seats at the tables of power. But that's the current reality of women's representation, across the board," said UN Women's Executive Director Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka.

She said men are 75 per cent of parliamentarians, hold 73 per cent of managerial positions, are 70 per cent of climate negotiators and almost all of the peacemakers.

"This is not an inclusive and equal world and we need to take action now to create one that does not discriminate against women. Only half is an equal share and only equal is enough".

Despite unprecedented global challenges, the report also proves that positive change is possible, as shown by the success of women's collective action to obtain accountability for crimes against them and the flourishing of feminist movements across the world.

It showcases successful initiatives in scaling up public services to meet women's rights, from increasing access to contraception and childcare, to reducing domestic violence and increasing women's participation in politics and peacebuilding.

The report is based on the UN Secretary-General's Report, which is the most comprehensive and participatory stock-taking exercise on women's rights ever undertaken, with contributions from 170 Member States.

It reveals that there have been advances in women's and girls' rights since the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action. There are now more girls in school than ever before, fewer women are dying in childbirth and the proportion of women in parliaments has doubled across the world. Over the past decade, 131 countries have passed laws to support women's equality.

But progress has been far too slow and uneven:

Globally, progress on women's access to paid work has ground to a halt over the past 20 years. Less than two thirds of women (62 per cent) aged 25-54 are in the labour force, compared to more than nine out of ten (93 per cent) men.

Women continue to shoulder the bulk of unpaid care and domestic work, and are on average paid 16 per cent less than men, rising to 35 per cent in some countries.

Nearly one in five women (18 per cent) have faced violence from an intimate partner in the past year. New technologies are fueling new forms of violence, such as cyber-harassment, for which policy solutions are largely absent.

The report notes 32 million girls are still not in school. Men still control three quarters of parliamentary seats. Women are largely excluded from peace processes, representing only 13 per cent of negotiators and only four per cent of signatories.

"2020 presents an unprecedented opportunity to turn things around for current and future generations of women and girls. To accelerate progress during the UN Decade of Action, UN Women has initiated six Action Coalitions that will mobilize governments, civil society, UN

agencies, and the private sector to deliver game-changing results to advance equality for women and girls,” said Mlambo-Ngcuka.

To catalyze systemic and lasting change the report points to the need to vastly increase financing for gender equality, to harness the potential of technology and innovation and ensure that development is inclusive of women and girls who face multiple forms of discrimination.

The UN says the 25th anniversary of the Beijing conference makes 2020 a milestone year for gender equality.

UN Women’s multi-generational campaign, Generation Equality, is sparking public mobilization, demanding accountability and driving accelerated action to advance women’s rights and gender equality, including to tackle the unfinished business of Beijing.

A global comic and cartoon competition on Beijing+25 and Generation Equality will be launched in partnership with Belgium, France, Mexico and the European Commission, calling on the younger generation to picture how gender equality looks like to them.

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