



BRIEF

THE UNITED STATES AND THE GENERATION EQUALITY FORUM

Advancing Commitments to Gender Equality and Women's Rights Globally

After years of debate as to whether or not to host a Fifth World Conference on Women,¹ UN Women and leading progressive nations wishing to mark the 25th anniversary of the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action at the Fourth World Conference on Women have created a champions-only space outside the United Nations (UN) system: the Generation Equality Forum (GEF).

The Generation Equality Forum (GEF),² organized by UN Women and the governments of Mexico and France, will create a space for governments to revisit the outcomes from the Fourth World Conference on Women; elevate issues such as climate change that were not a focus in 1995; make new, transformative commitments; and marshal resources and generate will toward achieving

the vision of Beijing and beyond.

For the Biden-Harris administration, the GEF offers among its first and best opportunities to demonstrate its renewed and unwavering commitment to these issues on the world stage. By making strong commitments³ to achieve gender equality and protect women's human rights across all six of the priority themes—organized in what are known as Action Coalitions—the United States can advance gender equality and women's rights both globally and domestically, in line with the Biden-Harris administration's priorities: an equitable recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, the advancement of racial justice and equity and a robust response to the global climate crisis.

1. GENDER BASED VIOLENCE (GBV)

Led by the governments of Iceland, Kenya, the United Kingdom and Uruguay

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated gender, racial, social and economic inequalities. One of its most harmful effects has been a global rise in GBV, particularly domestic violence, now termed the “shadow pandemic.”⁴ President Biden has identified ending gender-based violence in the U.S. and worldwide among his key priorities.⁵ As part of the GBV Action Coalition, the U.S. government should:

- ◆ **Dedicate at least 2 percent of official development assistance (ODA) to GBV prevention, mitigation and response.**⁶ This should include establishing a standalone GBV Fund for programs and initiatives to address GBV globally and to implement the U.S. Strategy to Prevent and Respond to GBV Globally. It can also include contributions to global funds and partnerships, like the UN Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women and the Spotlight Initiative to Eliminate Violence Against Women and Girls, and investments to end harmful practices like child marriage and female genital mutilation or cutting (FGM/C).
- ◆ **Announce commitments to develop a National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence and update the 2016 U.S. Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence Globally,** as articulated in the President’s Executive Order,⁷ effectively addressing GBV in all programs and policies domestically and internationally. Ensure that funding directly supports survivors, including Black, indigenous and immigrant women and girls, women and girls of color, and communities facing multiple barriers to resources and reporting.⁸
- ◆ **Ratify ILO Convention 190** on the elimination of violence and harassment in the world of work, and implement core elements into all business practices and sectors, trade policies and international assistance programming. While awaiting ratification, implement the terms of the Convention across all government agencies, including foreign assistance agencies.⁹

2. ECONOMIC JUSTICE AND RIGHTS (EJR)

Led by the governments of Germany, Mexico, South Africa, Spain and Sweden

During the COVID-19 pandemic, women have been more likely to drop out of the labor force than men—and now face the risks of long-term unemployment. Women are also more likely to be employed in sectors hardest hit by the pandemic, including service sectors such as restaurants, retail, hospitality and the informal sector.^{10,11} In the U.S., women of color—and particularly Black and Latinx women—are most affected by these employment losses.¹² The COVID-19 pandemic also increased women’s and girls’ unpaid care and domestic work responsibilities, which were already holding them back from economic opportunities, educational advancement and participation in public life and leisure.¹³ As part of the EJR Action Coalition, the U.S. government should:

- ◆ **Increase investments in the care economy** by allocating at least 2 percent of additional ODA to social infrastructure¹⁴ globally and 2 percent of GDP to social infrastructure domestically each year.¹⁵ In foreign assistance, this can start with investments in quality, paid child, elder and healthcare, including ensuring all U.S.-supported health programs pay the largely female frontline health workforce. On the domestic front, this can start with President Biden’s campaign commitments to invest \$775 billion into childcare, elder care and long-term care for persons with disabilities over the next 10 years, and guaranteeing mandatory paid parental leave of at least 12 weeks.¹⁶
- ◆ **Ensure intersectional gender analysis in all COVID-19 response and recovery plans.**¹⁷ Recognize the pandemic’s disproportionate impacts on vulnerable communities due to gender, race, class, sexuality, immigration status, ability and other identities—and guarantee adequate social protections for these groups.
- ◆ **Ensure women’s job security and enact protections to prevent exploitation,** particularly under COVID-19 circumstances. This includes ensuring fair wages, decent work conditions and other protections for those working from home and in the workplace.¹⁸ These protections must address all sectors, including the health and care sectors, which include mostly women workers, and domestic workers—the majority of whom are immigrants and women of color.¹⁹

3. BODILY AUTONOMY AND SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS (SRHR)

Led by the governments of Argentina, Burkina Faso, Denmark, France and North Macedonia

Research finds that a 10 percent decline in sexual and reproductive health services in low- and middle-income countries, due to reduced access in the COVID-19 pandemic, could lead to 15 million unintended pregnancies, 28,000 maternal deaths, 168,000 newborn deaths and 3.3 million unsafe abortions—all within a year.²⁰ School closures during the pandemic have also restricted girls' access to health supplies and education and increased rates of child marriage and FGM/C.²¹ As part of the Bodily Autonomy and SRHR Action Coalition, the U.S. government should:

- ◆ **Recommit to promoting SRHR in the U.S. and worldwide**, including access to safe and legal abortion, access to and uptake of modern contraceptives, strengthened comprehensive sexuality education and information, gender norm change and ending harmful practices like child marriage and FGM/C.²²
- ◆ **End restrictions on funding for abortion internationally and domestically**, specifically by terminating the Helms and Hyde Amendments and committing to veto or not pass legislation that extends, reiterates or incorporates these Amendments and other harmful policies—as identified in the Blueprint for Sexual and Reproductive Health, Rights and Justice.²³
- ◆ **Fully fund comprehensive SRHR programs**, including at least \$1.74 billion for global family planning and reproductive health programs and \$116 million for UNFPA.²⁴ In all domestic and global COVID-19 response and recovery plans, ensure funding addresses impacts on SRHR—including access to comprehensive SRHR services, strengthened supply chains and innovative digital health tools.²⁵

4. FEMINIST ACTION FOR CLIMATE JUSTICE

Led by the governments of Costa Rica and the Maldives

The effects of climate change are worsening worldwide, and the disproportionate impacts on women and girls are too.²⁶ Despite global evidence that climate change has exacerbated inequality, women, girls and marginalized communities are often excluded from key decision-making processes. As the Biden-Harris administration reengages in multilateral settings, the U.S. government must recognize its “climate debt to the Global South.”²⁷ The U.S. is among the world's largest carbon emitters and polluters, yet countries in the Global South are suffering the worst of climate change impacts. As part of the Feminist Action for Climate Justice Action Coalition, the U.S. government should:

- ◆ **Dedicate 20 percent of ‘principal’ and 100 percent of ‘significant’ climate funding to gender equality.**²⁸ Ensure this funding directly supports local women's rights organizations and eco-feminist efforts in the U.S. and in countries most impacted by the climate crisis.
- ◆ **Integrate intersectional gender analysis into all climate change plans and policies**, including at COP26 this year, and support the recommendations of the Feminist Green New Deal Coalition.²⁹

5. TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION FOR GENDER EQUALITY

Led by the governments of Armenia, Chile, Finland, Rwanda and Tunisia

The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed the strengths and shortfalls of technology and technological access. While increased reliance on technology offered social connection within crisis, harmful interactions—like harassment and abuse—also moved online. Further, communities lacking access to technology due to the digital divide were excluded from key resources, information and opportunities. As part of the Technology and Innovation for Gender Equality Action Coalition, the U.S. government should:

- ◆ **Support countries in ending technology-facilitated GBV,**³⁰ protecting women, girls and LGBTQIA+ persons. Work with leading technology companies to prevent and respond to online harassment and abuse.

- ◆ **Commit to ending the gender digital divide**, addressing hurdles that prevent women's and girls' equal and affordable access to digital resources, including financial services. Invest in programming for adolescent girls' involvement in STEM, ICT training and leadership building, aiming to reach the most excluded groups of adolescent girls.
- ◆ **Promote gender-responsive innovation**, supporting the meaningful participation of women and girls in all key decision-making processes, from inception and development to implementation and monitoring.

6. FEMINIST MOVEMENTS AND LEADERSHIP

Led by the governments of Canada, Malawi and the Netherlands

As the COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately affects women, girls and marginalized communities in the U.S. and worldwide, the need for inclusive, equitable leadership is even more clear. As part of the Feminist Movements and Leadership Action Coalition, the U.S. Government should:

- ◆ **Announce intentions to draft the world's next feminist foreign policy**, grounding all elements of U.S. foreign policy in transformative, rights-based principles.³¹
- ◆ **Dedicate 20 percent of ODA for gender equality as a 'principal' and 100 percent as a 'principal' or 'significant' objective within five years.**³² At current funding levels, the U.S. is far behind other donor countries in supporting gender equality.³³
- ◆ **Promote and expand civic space in the U.S., at the UN, and worldwide**, recognizing that civil society actors—including women's rights organizations, young feminist leaders, women human rights defenders and grassroots movements—are key leaders in driving forward progress toward a more promising future.

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T 202.797.0007 ♦ F 202.797.0020

1120 20th Street NW ♦ Suite 500 North, Washington, DC 20036

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