

# Generation Equality Forum (GEF) - Action Coalition 6 on Feminist Movements and Leadership (FML)

## Written submission in view of a future CEDAW General Recommendation on Equal and Inclusive Representation of Women in Decision-Making Systems (GR 40)<sup>1</sup>

February 2023

### Introduction

The equal, meaningful, and inclusive representation of women and girls in all their diversity in decision-making systems constitutes an integral part of the Generation Equality Forum's (GEF) objectives and is central to the Forum's mandate and ensuing processes. GEF's vision is outlined in [six broad-based and inclusive action coalitions](#) and in the [Women, Peace & Security and Humanitarian Action Compact](#), which are earmarked to achieve substantive change by 2026. While equal and inclusive decision-making is relevant across all areas of GEF, the present submission builds specifically on the blueprint developed by Action Coalition 6 on Feminist Movements and Leadership (AC 6 or FML).

GEF aims to engage and bring together diverse stakeholders and rights holders to promote and sustain substantial and transformative action toward gender equality. It considers the equal representation of women and feminist leaders in all their diversity to be a key factor in achieving gender equality in all fields and across all Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), in particular SDG target 5.5, "to ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life."

GEF recognizes the critical ways in which discrimination, sexual and gender-based violence, harmful practices, unpaid care work, access to sexual and reproductive health and rights, economic empowerment, technology, and legislation deeply affect women, trans, youth, and black, Indigenous Peoples and people of colour (BIPOC) access to leadership opportunities and inclusive representation in decision-making.

Additionally, for gender parity to be realised, States must eliminate discrimination and gender-based violence against women and to provide equal enjoyment of their rights addressed through all UN human rights treaties, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). GEF's vision is also grounded in the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

**GEF consultations identified strong linkages between gender equality, parity and justice, robust women's and feminist movements, and implementation of a feminist and intersectional approach to leadership and decision-making, all of which are crucial to ensuring CEDAW implementation.**

Action Coalition 6 on FML<sup>2</sup> specifically calls on organizations and institutions in all sectors, namely the public and private sectors and state institutions that include the executive and

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<sup>1</sup> Pursuant to the following announcement: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/events/events/2023/half-day-general-discussion-equal-and-inclusive-representation-women-decision>

<sup>2</sup> Find the full list of Action Coalition leaders [here](#)

legislative branches, to implement CEDAW and to act on their commitments through the GEF processes to achieve gender equality, justice, peace, and human rights.

FML calls on these diverse stakeholders to provide and increase financial, legal and policy support for feminist movements and organizations in addition to committing to practicing feminist principles and feminist leadership, shifting, and sharing power with historically marginalized groups and people, and promoting gender equality, parity and justice, and women and feminist leaders' participation and empowerment in all decision-making spaces.

The Action Coalition considers that there is also a need to deepen solidarity within feminist movements and across social, racial, reproductive and climate justice movements, to integrate intersectionality as a central approach, and to act on the demands of young feminists, including those presented in the Young Feminist Manifesto published during the Generation Equality Forum for full and meaningful participation and young feminist-led decision-making spaces.

AC 6 views the proposed General Recommendation as an opportunity for advancing a paradigm shift towards inclusive leadership and feminist decision-making processes and outcomes.

## 1. Background

### ➤ The Generation Equality Forum (GEF)<sup>3</sup>

Given the little advancement across all critical areas of concern set by the landmark Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, GEF was initiated in 2021 by UN Women, together with the governments of Mexico and France and in collaboration with civil society.

The Forum set to lead an ambitious agenda in accelerating investment in and implementation of gender equality commitments in parallel to that of the SDGs<sup>4</sup>. The Forum launched a 5-year action agenda narrowed down in a comprehensive **Global Acceleration Plan**<sup>5</sup>, which defines the most critical actions necessary to accelerate progress until 2026 while catalysing the energy, activism, and ideas of young people in expanding public support.

The process is comprised of six Action Coalitions and a Global Compact on Women, Peace, Security and Humanitarian Action, each of which is spear-heading a critical part of the Generation Equality agenda.

### ➤ Action Coalition 6 for Feminist Movements and Leadership (FML)

Action Coalition 6 is a global, innovative multi-stakeholder partnership that aims to catalyse collective action, spark global and local conversations among generations, drive increased public and private investment and deliver concrete, transformative results for women and girls in all their diversity.

It envisions that by 2026, feminist leaders and activists, women human rights defenders, and their movements and organizations, including, but not limited to those led by lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex and non-binary people, racialized people, indigenous women, women and persons with disabilities, women and persons living with and affected by HIV, young

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<sup>3</sup> Find more about the Generation Equality Forum [here](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Press release](#)

<sup>5</sup> Find the Global Acceleration Plan [here](#)

feminists, girls, sex workers and other historically marginalized people, regardless of their status before the law, are fully resourced and supported to become sustainable. This approach thrives to empower them to carry out their work without fear of reprisal, and advance gender equality, justice, peace, and human rights for all from an intersectional approach.

It recognizes that feminist leadership is both about who holds power and what to do with that power and ultimately who benefits from or is empowered by this renewed exercise of power. To challenge longstanding stereotypes regarding who is entitled to hold power, gender parity in positions of power is an important objective to be pursued. This is a necessary, but not sufficient, step to ensure feminist leadership, which shares power and responsibility in an inclusive, intersectional, empowering, and participatory manner.

Feminists who are committed to an intersectional approach are organizing social, racial, reproductive and climate justice movements and are challenging current systems of criminalization, discrimination and inequality, looking for holistic, context-specific and innovative solutions, through processes of co-creation and collaboration. This includes challenging the current functioning of multilateral organizations and global power hierarchies, where feminist leaders, activists and movements are demanding to be meaningfully involved in, and co-create, participatory and democratic processes.

Feminist leadership offers: 1) transformative and innovative approaches that model broader participation of diverse partners; 2) greater commitment to democratic principles, policies and practices towards creating long-lasting and sustainable solutions for equality; and 3) opportunities to address unequal power dynamics that undermine the achievement of gender parity and the realization of women's rights and gender equality globally.

Action 3 of AC 6 therefore commits to **“Advance substantive representation and increase meaningful participation, leadership and decision-making power of women, girls, trans, intersex and non-binary people, in all their diversity, through gender parity (3.1) and transformative feminist approaches to policy-making (3.2)”**.

## 2. The Importance of Feminist Leadership Approaches to Achieving Gender Parity in Representation and Inclusive Decision-Making

Focusing on the topics of feminist leadership, gender parity in representation and inclusive participation in decision-making, Action Coalition 6 specifically:

- Recognizes that achieving gender equality is at the core of the SDG agenda and is instrumental for its success;
- Stresses that feminist movements are key drivers for systemic change and social transformation, which is essential for achieving the SDG agenda;
- Underlines that, despite advances, the goal of ensuring women's equal representation in national parliaments is falling behind<sup>6</sup>, while globally at the local level, only 20% of mayors are women and far fewer are gender diverse<sup>7</sup>. This calls for urgent action in addressing and significantly reducing all existing systemic public and private sphere barriers that hinder women from active leadership and make leadership a near impossible task for women;

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<sup>6</sup> According to the IPU, women's representation in national parliaments grew from only 12 per cent in 1995 to an average of 26.5 per cent by the end of 2022. At the current rate of progress (+0.4 percentage point annually), it would take another 6 decades to achieve gender parity.

<sup>7</sup> United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG). From Making Commitments to Realizing Change: Local and Regional Governments' Progress on Gender Equality. 2022. Link: [report\\_sdg5\\_hlpf2022.pdf](https://www.uclg.org/reports/report_sdg5_hlpf2022.pdf) (uclg.org)

- Emphasizes that feminist activists, organizations and women human rights defenders are under attack, and are impeded by the fact that anti-gender and anti-rights forces, which are often avidly anti-feminist in their agenda, are gathering momentum globally;
- Highlights that anti-rights forces are increasingly well-funded and well organized, resulting in further contraction of civic space - both online and offline - attacks and violence, and reprisals for those who resist these forces;
- Observes that a shrinking of financial investments in feminist organizations and increased restrictions on civic spaces and opportunities for collectivization and mobilization, creates barriers for feminist action and leadership;
- Stresses that women and feminist activists and leaders are also targeted as a means to push them out of politics and decision-making spaces, at all levels and spheres of government, especially when they advance gender equality and promote feminist agendas.<sup>8</sup>

AC 6 Action 3 has two specific objectives:

- **Advance gender parity and the inclusion of those historically marginalized in all aspects, sectors and levels of public and economic decision-making**, including the private sector, civil society, international organizations, political and government institutions and executive and legislative positions.
- **Promote and expand feminist, gender transformative, intersectional approaches to decision-making and leadership**, which acknowledges, analyses and challenges existing power relations and advances inclusive, gender transformative and rights-affirming laws and policies.

### 3. Promoting the Participation and Leadership of Feminist Activists, Organizations, and Movements in Decision-Making Systems

AC 6 seeks to create an enabling environment for feminist action, recognizing that the representation of women and girls in all their diversity in decision-making systems extends beyond women's direct political participation. To ensure the equal representation of women and girls in all their diversity and systems to support the work of the feminist activists, organizations, and movements working outside of formal decision-making systems. This support is essential to ensuring that feminist actors can participate and lead the development and implementation of laws, policies, and practices that impact their rights and well-being.

**Sustained funding and support for feminist activists, organizations, and movements** is an essential prerequisite for women's equal participation in decision-making spaces. Sustained funding and support allows activists to set their priorities for action, while increasing their resources and capacity to be present and take leadership within key decision-making spaces. Action 1 of the FML Blueprint reflects this priority, calling on actors to fund and support diverse feminist activists, organizations, and movements by at least doubling the global annual growth rate for funding to these actors with an emphasis on supporting the historically most marginalized. Our Action Coalition has developed a framework for feminist funding and support that can make equal representation in decision-making systems possible.

To ensure the equal representation of women and girls in all of their diversity in decision-making spaces, we must also **promote, expand, strengthen, and protect civic space for women human rights defenders, feminist action, organizing and mobilization, in all of its diversity**. This priority is reflected in Action 2 of our Blueprint, which puts forward a

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<sup>8</sup> UN Human Rights Council. 2018. [Report of the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women](#); IPU. 2016. [Sexism, Harassment and Violence against Women Parliamentarians](#).

framework for creating an enabling environment that allows feminist actors to do their work safely and effectively, including when that work intersects with decision-making systems.

Finally, recognizing and practicing **intersectionality** is the backbone of equal and inclusive representation in decision-making systems. As an Action Coalition, we are committed to the inclusion of people and groups who have historically encountered stigma, racism, discrimination and stereotyping within society as well as within feminist movements. We further recognize that feminist and women's rights movements and organizations are diverse, and that it is imperative that this diversity is fully represented in decision-making. Furthermore, our Blueprint for Action specifically recognizes the need to **strengthen young feminist-led and girls-led movements and organizations, in all their diversity**, calling on actors to ensure the requisite enabling environment to allow for that strengthening and opportunities for representation and participation, including in decision-making systems.

#### 4. Good Practices Towards Ensuring Equal and Inclusive Representation of Women in Decision-Making Systems

AC 6 leaders represent a diverse constituency of States, civil society organizations, United Nations agencies, international organizations, philanthropic organizations, and private sector actors working together to promote, among other priorities, equal and inclusive representation of women and girls in all of their diversity in decision-making spaces. Individually and collectively, we have developed several good practice examples in this area.

- Malawi as a co-leader of the AC 6 enacted a law that promotes quotas in representation in terms of equal opportunities in public employment and promotions (Gender Equality Act 2013; section 11) where no either sex should be more than 60% and not less than 40%.
- Worldwide, States are increasingly adopting gender quotas for parliamentary elections and appointments to accelerate progress in redressing the historical underrepresentation of women. In 2021, countries with some form of quota elected 31.9 per cent women on average to their lower or single house of parliament, while those without quotas elected only 19.5 per cent women overall.<sup>9</sup> For such quotas to be fully effective, they must be ambitious, well-designed and duly enforced. Ultimately, they should aim for gender parity.<sup>10</sup> The IPU has been supporting parliaments to achieve this goal. In January 2023, following a constitutional amendment supported by the IPU and electoral law reform that included a new quota provision, the Parliament of Benin elected over 25% women to parliament, up from 7% previously. To date, 6 parliaments have at least 50% women in their lower or single houses.<sup>11</sup> In addition to quotas, parliaments and government are called upon to create an enabling environment through a set of measures embedded in a National Action Plan.<sup>12</sup>
- In 2022, the Netherlands adopted a Feminist Foreign Policy focused on integrating feminist principles and gender equity principles into all elements of its foreign policy. Additionally, the Netherlands continues to be a world leader in investing in women's rights, gender equality and feminist movements and organizations through the SDG5 fund. The Netherlands moves to a second position in its share of development

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<sup>9</sup> IPU, [Women in parliament in 2021: the year in review](#) (2022).

<sup>10</sup> See IPU resolution [The freedom of women to participate in political processes fully, safely and without interference: Building partnerships between men and women to achieve this objective](#) (2016).

<sup>11</sup> IPU, [Monthly ranking of women in national parliaments](#) (1 January 2023).

<sup>12</sup> See [Joint Call by IPU and CEDAW Committee on International Women's Day 2021](#).

assistance committed to gender equality and ranks first in share of development assistance with gender equality as its priority focus (OECD data on ODA spent in 2020-2021).

- Local and regional governments around the world, represented in the Action Coalition by United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), are committing to feminist forms of leadership. This Feminist Municipal Movement includes an institutional dimension, involving the localisation of global agendas, such as the SDGs; a leadership dimension, wherein new values, such as empathy, solidarity, proximity, and care are increasingly emphasised by local elected leaders; and thirdly, includes an increasing recognition of a multiplicity of voices and new political themes, such as care as a right, the right to the commons, the right to the city, and ecological justice.<sup>13</sup>
- In December 2022, the Inclusive Generation Equality Collective—a group of feminists with disabilities and allies working towards ensuring meaningful representation of feminists with disabilities in gender equality spaces—launched the Feminist Accessibility Protocol. Recognizing the barriers that feminists with disabilities have persistently faced in accessing the spaces where important decisions about gender equality and women’s rights are made, this Protocol asks States, UN Agencies, feminists, civil society organizations, and other entities to commit to ensuring that decision-making spaces and systems are accessible to and inclusive of feminists with disabilities and promote their participation and leadership. To date, the Protocol has over 100 signatories from diverse feminist actors, and the Collective will be building the capacity of feminist actors to implement the Protocol and monitoring its implementation in feminist spaces starting in 2023.
- Feminist movements and women politicians globally have been stepping up, reclaiming power, and playing a central role in reimagining democratic changes from Türkiye to Brazil, Mexico, India, and Iran. Feminist leaders are challenging misogyny and taking enormous risks demanding democracy. These feminist struggles continue to prove that supporting and empowering progressive women leaders are crucial to countering anti-democratic tendencies. As recent movements have established, those governments that hope to counter harsh autocratic anti-gender policies will need to promote the inclusive political participation of women in decision-making as feminist movements continue to fight back and create lasting change in democracies. These stronger and more inclusive democracies in turn can benefit all citizens, grounding government decision-making in lived experiences and more accountable to the people they serve, while creating spaces to amplify the voices and needs of women and gender diverse communities.
- The COVID-19 crisis laid bare sex workers’ vulnerabilities and triggered a strong show of mass solidarity which resulted in decriminalisation of sex work in Belgium in March 2022. New Zealand was the first country in the world to decriminalize sex work, joined by several states in Australia. South Africa and several states in the United States are on the cusp of decriminalization. Decriminalisation enables meaningful participation and mobilisation of sex workers, giving them legitimised access to decision making spaces where they can contribute to public debates and represent their own needs and rights.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> UCLG. A Global Feminist Municipal Movement: The Transformative Commitment of Cities and Territories to Generation Equality. 2021. Link: [www.uclg-cglu.org/sites/default/files/the\\_transformative\\_commitment\\_of\\_cities\\_and\\_territories\\_to\\_generation\\_equality.pdf](http://www.uclg-cglu.org/sites/default/files/the_transformative_commitment_of_cities_and_territories_to_generation_equality.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> New Zealand was the first country in the world to fully decriminalize sex work. South Africa is on the cusp of decriminalizing sex work (<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/south-africa-legalize-sex-work-prostitution-to-tackle-crime-against-women-hiv/>) as are a number of states in the US (particularly by repealing anti-loitering laws -

## 5. Recommendations to the CEDAW Committee for its Development of a General Recommendation on Equal and Inclusive Representation of Women in Decision-Making Spaces

In the context of developing its General Recommendation, AC 6 leaders encourage the CEDAW Committee members to:

- Focus on the need to strengthen formal and informal systems to ensure women and girls, in all their diversity, have the tools and capacity for decision-making
  - Recognize decision-making spaces as those beyond political spaces including but not limited to domestic spaces
  - Provide for guidelines on adequate budgetary allocation and sustained resources towards strengthening equal and inclusive participation and representation of women and girls, in all their diversity, in decision-making spaces
  - Emphasize the value of strong feminist movements led by women and girls, in all their diversity, in strengthening intersectional feminist leadership and highlighting the systemic and systematic threats to social and human rights movements globally
  - Address the role of women and girls, in all their diversity, in unpaid care work and obstacles to equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making spaces being the lack of support services
  - Centre those who have been historically marginalized and discriminated and systemically and systematically excluded from decision-making spaces
  - Underline the need of safe spaces for women and girls, in all their diversity, for decision-making in view of the rise in the anti-gender and anti-rights spaces
- Action needed to advance substantive inclusive representation and increase the meaningful participation, leadership and decision-making power of girls and youth leaders, and of women, and feminist leaders in all their diversity, including those who are trans, intersex and non-binary

More specifically AC 6 calls on the CEDAW Committee to consider recommending to all spheres of government and all other stakeholders<sup>15</sup> to:

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including California <https://www.oeregister.com/2023/01/30/decriminalizing-prostitution-minimizes-violence-and-exploitation-senate-bill-357-is-a-key-first-step/> and New York <https://www.nbcnews.com/feature/nbc-out/new-york-repeals-walking-while-trans-law-after-years-activism-n1256736>) and Northern Territory, Australia (<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-11-26/northern-territory-sex-industry-bill-passed/11739820>). Several other countries have partially decriminalized sex work (including Germany, the Netherlands, Austria, Switzerland, Turkey, Greece, Ecuador, Bolivia, Peru and Uruguay).

<sup>15</sup> AC 6 addresses its call for action to organizations and institutions in all sectors, namely the public and private sectors and state institutions that include the executive and legislative branches, both at the national and sub-national level.

- Develop and implement laws and policies with an intersectional lens to advance gender parity and substantive representation to ensure meaningful participation of women, girls, trans, intersex and non-binary people in all their diversity, in all decision-making and agenda-setting;
  - Develop and implement in particular laws and policies - both in the public and private sectors, and at the local, national and international levels - such as quotas that mandate gender parity and inclusive representation of those historically excluded from decision-making, including from an age, ethnicity and disability perspective;
  - Develop and implement laws and policies, including domestic and foreign policy, that enable a feminist approach to decision-making, and which promote human rights, as well as the principles of participation, democracy, justice, transparency, accountability, non-discrimination, equity, equality, care and empowerment;
  - Collect, analyse and disseminate data on the participation of all women, and girls, and gender diverse persons including lesbian, bisexual, trans, intersex and non-binary people in all their diversity in decision-making, including data disaggregated by age, gender, ethnicity, and disability, among other identities;
  - Collect sex and gender disaggregated data, as well as conduct and communicate intersectional feminist analysis in the preparation, implementation and monitoring of policies, budgets, and laws;
  - Build cross-sector and cross-governmental alliances and support pairing, co-learning, experience and capacity sharing for and with feminist activists, organizations, movements in all their diversity, and leaders;
  - Encourage and support intersectional, intercultural and multi-generational dialogue, as well as dialogues between all spheres of government with civil society and grassroots movements;
  - Address harmful stereotypes and gender norms to ensure decision-making power and leadership for feminist activists, organizations, and movements in all their diversity. In particular, seek to shift away from harmful and violent forms of masculinity, and encourage caring masculinities, and address all forms of gender-based and intersectional forms of discrimination and violence against women and feminist leaders;
  - Support and value social justice movements and civil society organizations as stepping stones for young women's engagement in formal politics, including by providing flexible, predictable, accessible and long-term funding to young women's movements and organizations, and creating spaces for them to interact with different spheres of government;
  - Invest in progressive, gender transformative and feminist economic policies that include intersectional approaches, and gender budgeting mechanisms in all levels of government, private sector, international organizations, civil society organizations, and sectors of the economy.
- Action needed to promote the participation and leadership of feminist activists, organizations, and movements in decision-making systems



Within that framework, we call on the CEDAW Committee to recommend to all relevant stakeholder to take the following action:

- Ensure sustained funding and support for feminist activists, organizations, leaders and movements; in particular:**
  - Advance protection measures, strategies, policies, and enforceable legislation to protect the human rights of women human rights defenders, leaders, and feminist activists, organizations and movements in all their diversity;
  - Monitor, document and report on human rights violations against these actors in full respect of the do no harm principle, while ensuring accountability for those violations; and
  - Deepen solidarity within feminist movements and between all social justice movements, working to eliminate harmful norms, stereotypes and practices that reinforce discrimination and inequality within structures and among individuals, entrench inequality, and stigmatize feminist activists, organizations, and movements in all their diversity.
  
- Promote, expand, strengthen, and protect civic space for women human rights defenders, feminist action, organizing and mobilization, in all its diversity.**

We call on actors to increase funding for feminist activists, organizations, and movements, to develop and implement policies that ensure that more and better funding is widely accessible and is guided by feminist principles, and to improve transparency around funding and accountability to women and girl-led organizations for that funding.