

**To the attention of
Amina J. Mohammed
Secretary-General's Special Adviser on Post-2015 Development Planning
United Nations**

31 October 2014

Re: Recommendations for the Synthesis Report from the Women's Major Group

Honourable Amina J. Mohammed


We, the Women's Major Group and the Post-2015 Women's Coalition, are writing to you in advance of the publication of the Secretary General's Synthesis Report on the post-2015 sustainable development agenda to share with you the key areas that we hope will be included in the report.

We understand that the Synthesis Report will be a very important contribution to the upcoming negotiations on the development of the post-2015 framework and, alongside the Open Working Group's Outcome Document, will form the basis for many of the discussions going forward. It is for this reason that we consider it imperative that the Synthesis Report should express a real ambition to realise the urgent transformational change that is necessary to achieve gender equality, women's human rights, sustainable development in harmony with nature, and to end inequality. Our recommendations should be considered not as a call to re-open negotiations on the goals and targets, – the SDG report should be retained in full as the basis for the next steps – but as recommendations for the Synthesis Report to set the ambition for the overall framing of the agenda.

We specifically call on you to ensure that the Synthesis Report is **based on human rights obligations and commitments that place gender equality at the centre, addresses root causes of inequalities and poverty and the concentration of power and wealth in the hands of a few, and places women of all ages at the core of sustainable and peaceful development and resource management respectful of women's rights and planetary boundaries.**

Human rights must be at the centre of the new development framework; the denial of human rights can affect women and girls disproportionality due to discrimination and persistent gender inequalities¹ Gender norms and power relations that violate women's human rights mean that women customarily have limited access and control over land, and other economic and productive resources, and are often prevented from making important decisions about their bodies and the course of their lives, such as those related to education, employment, health,

¹ taking into account intersecting inequalities and ensuring non-discrimination based on gender, age, class, caste, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identities and abilities




and family life. Their multiple burdens of work in earning incomes and caring for families intersect, contributing to their extreme poverty, and creating enormous challenges for their ability ensure their families' livelihoods and their own livelihood and survival. As long as opportunities for women and girls are limited by gender stereotypes that perpetuate inequalities in their families and communities, all of women's and girls' human rights – economic, social, cultural, civil and political, and including sexual and reproductive health and rights – will be in jeopardy.

We welcome the commitment in the Open Working Group Outcome Document to having a **standalone goal entitled “Achieve gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls”** with its targets to end all forms of violence, discrimination, early and forced marriage and harmful practices against women and girls, guarantee universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, to ensure women's full participation in decision making, and equal rights to land and economic resources. We also welcome the fact that gender equality and women's rights are addressed in different goal areas including equal rights to education and life-long learning, to decent work and equal pay for work of equal value, and ensure healthy lives for all at all ages. We encourage you to highlight and support this global consensus in the Synthesis Report.

However, it is imperative that the Synthesis Report shows how the framework should go further and that it calls to **reflects the existing human rights framework**, as outlined in human rights treaties and consensus documents, including the right to development that reflect the need to fully respect, protect, and fulfil human rights. It needs to ensure that the **framework is structured around human rights obligations and commitments**, including the full range of civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights, and the principles of non-discrimination, substantive equality, participation and universality. The development framework should also reflect the responsibility of the relevant duty bearers, including states, UN agencies, and private actors such as corporations, towards fulfilling human rights obligations.

Further, the **content** of human rights obligations and commitments must be reflected in the post-2015 sustainable development agenda and consistently expressed as “realising the right to...”, as opposed to “access to...”. For example, we would anticipate that reference to a goal on education would refer to “the right to free education”, as reflected in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. In the context of health, it is essential that the Synthesis Report fully reflect the need to realise sexual and reproductive health and rights. This includes not only the need to ensure that sexual and reproductive health services and information, including comprehensive sexuality education, are accessible, acceptable, available and of good quality, but also that right of individuals to make decisions about sexuality and reproduction free from violence, coercion, and discrimination is fully realized. The targets must be translated into global indicators that should become tangible, actionable steps to achieving the realisation of these rights, taking into particular account the experience of women, girls and the most marginalised. Also, indicators should be set to reduce the burden on unpaid domestic and care work that now relies on the shoulders of women and redistribute this between the States, private sector, communities, households, families, women and men. Finally, as a means of empowering individuals, the Post-2015 Sustainable Development Agenda needs to take a




human rights-based approach to ensuring transparent and participatory mechanisms for holding states accountable to their development commitments and promoting access to justice for violations of rights, including violence against Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs).

Secondly, we call on you to ensure that the Synthesis Report addresses the challenges created by the **concentration of power and wealth in the hands of a few**. The concentration of power and wealth **imbalances that deepen poverty and inequalities within and between countries** must be addressed, **and the Synthesis Report should call for concrete action to transform the current macroeconomic policies and fiscal policies that are undermining human rights and economic, gender and environmental justice**. For the post-2015 framework to be transformative, it must acknowledge that the current development model based on economic growth has failed to address concentrations of wealth that are deepening poverty, inequalities, and environmental degradation. Every year the gap grows further. Currently, the 65 richest individuals own as much as the bottom 50% worldwide. Just 5% of the 46.2 trillion-dollar wealth of the world's so called "High Net-Worth Individuals" is enough to cover the annual cost of a global social protection floor and climate change adaptation and mitigation combined. For the new agenda to be transformative, it must radically change the global political economy system through a redistributive framework that aims to reduce inequalities of wealth, power and resources between countries, within countries, between rich and poor, and between men and women. To set on the path to achieving this, the Synthesis Report must call for the regulation of financial markets, "Universal" social protection floors for all; progressive tax systems worldwide, including elimination of VAT for basic foods, medicines and sanitary products; the implementation of innovative financing mechanisms for development, such as global taxes, specially the financial transactions taxes; action on the elimination of illicit financial flows; and the reformation of the global trade and finance agenda, including through addressing the responsibilities of International Financial Institutions. Finally, strategies for redistribution of wealth and power need to include ensuring that funding for SDGs reach the local and remote communities and specific efforts are made to fund women organisations and women human rights defenders.

Thirdly, we call on you to ensure that the Synthesis Report reflects the **essential role that women must play at the centre of sustainable resource management respectful of human rights and planetary boundaries**. The new agenda must focus on and prioritise sustainable use approaches, including ensuring the rights of communities and indigenous peoples to natural resource management and policies that give resource and tenure rights to women; this is vital for women. This would allow them to increase the benefits they derive from natural resources, with significant implications for food sovereignty and poverty eradication. The sexual division of labour must not be an obstacle for persons to take part in the transition towards sustainable resource management. In the light of land-grabbing and the growing competition for land and resources, ending violence by States and Corporations against women defending their access and control of natural resources, should be a priority.

Further, it **must recognise the role of women, indigenous peoples, small farmers and small scale fishers in conserving and restoring soils, coastal and marine territories and other ecosystems**. The role of traditional knowledge is particularly important for ecosystem



conservation and restoration. Women— in all their cultural diversity as indigenous people, afro-descendants, peasants and fisherwomen — have a collective but differentiated traditional knowledge about natural resources that is crucial to the future sustainable management and conservation of those resources. We ask you to ensure that generations of expertise are not ignored in the post-2015 framework; to ensure healthy and sustainable planet-centred development, the voices and experience of these women must be reflected in the Synthesis Report to ensure that they carry through to the negotiation phase.

We finally call on you to ensure that the Synthesis Report will also contain the build blocks to ensure **strong participation of civil society including the Women's Major Group and other constituencies** in the process leading up to and following the Post-2015 Summit in September 2015. The process must be inclusive, with full access and meaningful participation of Major Groups and civil society. It will be essential to transparency and integrity of the forthcoming negotiations, as has been demonstrated by our participation in the Open Working Group, where we have fostered essential links between the global and national levels.

As a diverse range of organisations and networks, representing millions of individuals around the world, we feel strongly that the post-2015 sustainable development agenda will be the guiding framework for global development and cooperation for the next years; the fate of humanity and our environment is at stake. Women's bodies and lives must not continue to be subjected to national agendas that may not reflect global human rights norms. We continue to call consistently for a truly universal agenda grounded in human rights. We refuse for our lives to be negotiating chips. Therefore, we expect nothing less than a transformative and universal agenda that will ensure a just, equitable and sustainable world in which all people, including women and girls who comprise 50% of the planet's population, will experience individual and collective well-being, a life in dignity and the full enjoyment of human rights.

We are ready to work with you to make this call a reality.

Respectfully,

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