

GWI United Nation Representative Advocacy Report 2021

GWI advocacy goals

1. 100% of United Nations Member States commit to policy, legislation, budget and infrastructure to facilitate transition of girls from primary to secondary school and ensure gender parity and gender equality throughout secondary education by 2030.
2. By 2030 100% of United Nations low income Member States have increased access to tertiary education for girls and women by 50%.
3. 100% of United Nations Member States commit to and implement policies for continuing education to empower women throughout the life course, within the formal and informal economies.
4. Influence the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4.
5. All 17 SDGs will include girls' education targets.

Please bear in mind these five overarching, long-term goals during any United Nations intervention that you make on behalf of GWI. Any intervention should push these five goals further.

NB: *Although these goals represent GWI's mission, our United Nations Representatives are should always promote all GWI key messages and represent GWI professionally.*

Name: Maryella Hannum

City of UN Representation: UN/New York

Session/meeting attended: Virtual Townhall Meeting of Civil Society and UN Secretary-General (SG), Antonio Guterres, Tuesday, 16 March 2021

Subject of session/meeting: The meeting provided an opportunity for women and youth civil society organizations to engage with the UN Secretary-General (SG) on the CSW65 Priority Theme: Women's full and effective participation and decision-making in public life, as well as the elimination of violence, for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls.

The townhall also built upon discussions from the SG virtual meeting with women's civil society in light of the COVID-19 crisis, addressing ways to build back better and continue protecting and promoting women's rights and agency within this new context.

Summary of session/meeting:

The SG began the session by proclaiming that his priority for the session was not to answer questions but to listen. He wanted to hear the opinions and suggestions of civil society representatives, and to then be able to incorporate them into "our" thinking and forthcoming policies.

The SG went on to present some alarming information as a result of the pandemic and what it has meant in terms of progress for women's rights and gender equality. He emphasized that the social and economic impact of COVID-19 has been devastating for women's rights. He particularly focused his comments on the rights of the most vulnerable and marginalized poor women and particularly on women working in the "informal" economy. The SG stressed that, according to the World Bank, women in Latin America and the Caribbean were 44 percent more likely than men to lose their jobs at the onset of the crisis. And, he noted that UNICEF reported in the prior week that up to ten million more girls were at risk of becoming child brides as a result of the pandemic.

The SG reviewed and acknowledged the severe impact of COVID-19 on many fronts; i.e. on domestic violence as many women are trapped at home with their abusers, on education with school closures, overburdened elder and healthcare services with women bearing the brunt of the care economy, and the inequalities that all of these dilemmas perpetuate. Many of these issues were considered emergencies even before COVID-19. Furthering the crises is a lack of access for women to sexual and reproductive health services and an extended disruption of supplies and services.

The SG stressed the importance of women in equal roles in building the recovery from COVID-19 and to address the serious setbacks to gender equality and women's rights. A quote from the SG's remarks, "Male-dominated teams will come up with male-dominated solutions." The SG said that we need to see the severe impact of COVID-19 as an opportunity for a reset to address the fragility in healthcare systems, social protections, access to justice, the wellbeing of our planet, and in localizing progress in sustainable development. The SG especially emphasized that *"women need to be front and center of the recovery from the pandemic, not as a matter of charity, not even as a matter of justice and basic human rights, but as a matter of economics, of efficiency and effectiveness, of social and community resilience."*

"Women's full representation and leadership are a prerequisite for making the best use of all our resources. Women have proven this once again during the pandemic." He acknowledged that women have served as frontline workers and essential workers during the pandemic keeping communities afloat. He also talked at length about women and domestic violence, calling for an initiative to end all forms of violence against women and girls.

The SG remarks outlined the impact of COVID-19 as an opportunity that must be seized. He stated, as he has in the past, that "Gender equality is still a question of power as we still live in a male dominate world and a male dominated culture."

In his remarks, the SG called on leaders in all sectors of society to step up and take five "transformative actions" to build women's representation, participation and leadership. The five actions are:

- 1) Realize women's equal rights by repealing all discriminatory laws and enacting positive measures.

- 2) Take concrete steps, including special measures like quotas, so that women have equal representation everywhere: on company boards, in the media, at academic institutions, and in parliaments and governments.
- 3) Support women's economic inclusion by enabling them to join and remain in the workforce in decent jobs with equal pay and a living wage. Protect their jobs in both the formal and informal sectors; give them equal access to credit; and invest in the care economy and social protection.
- 4) He called on all countries to address violence against women and girls through emergency plans, backed by funding, policies, and political will.
- 5) Make space for the intergenerational transition that is underway. Seek out and support young women leaders who are advocating everywhere for a more just and equal world.

He then called for ideas, suggestions, proposals and criticisms from civil society representatives as part of the town hall meeting. During the remainder of the session civil society representatives shared opinions, views and desired actions on gender equality and the many impacts involving COVID-19.

The townhall was engaging, informative, and insightful. Topics on many issues arose from domestic violence to how to hold states accountable for their actions and abide by their commitments. The SG acknowledged that systems for accountability are weak. He stated it is important to recognize this fact in order to make progress.

Key messages included going "back to normal" from COVID-19 is not acceptable. Gender equality must be placed at the heart of recovery plans. The SG clearly stated that gender equality is a question of power. He emphasized that power is NOT given. So regarding the concern on how to obtain power he said, "power is not given, it is taken." So, we all must realize and act on this fact.

For more information see: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2021/3/news-town-hall-with-civil-society-during-csw65>

Submitted by:

Maryella Hannum
GWI UN Representative/NY