



**RE: The 64th United Nations Commission on the Status of Women
(Beijing+25: Realizing Gender Equality and the Empowerment of All
Women and Girls)**

Written Statement from the Anglican Consultative Council, March 2020

The Anglican Consultative Council welcomes the 25th anniversary review of the Beijing Platform for Action at the 64th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women. The Anglican Communion is the world's third largest Christian communion, comprised of forty provinces across over 165 countries, all working in various capacities to transform unjust structures of society, challenge violence, pursue peace and reconciliation, safeguard creation and act in loving service.

Tackling the deep injustices of gender inequality is an integral part of our Anglican mission. This is based on our Christian belief that women and men are created equally in the image of God and that just relationships between women and men, girls and boys are fundamental to human flourishing. Sadly, the global family is falling drastically short of this Gospel imperative. Gendered attitudes, assumptions and stereotypes can shape negative behaviours and impose burdens on all of us. Harmful patterns of patriarchy and misogyny need to be held to the light of God's redemptive love. In this moment of celebration of twenty-five years of the Beijing Platform, we seek to uphold the intrinsic value of women and girls and the commitment to social justice and empowerment outlined in the Declaration, while lamenting that much of its powerful vision remains unrealized.

Importance of engagement with faith communities

Church leaders and faith communities have pivotal role to play in transforming culturally embedded gender injustices. People of faith have sometimes been responsible for maintaining the status quo, or of reinforcing stereotyped constructions of masculinity and femininity that enable gender-based violence and other injustices. These unequal power relations have far-reaching consequences for all of God's people, their families, communities, and all nations.

Churches, communities and agencies across the Anglican Communion have been challenging harmful narratives and actively promoting gender justice as integral to ensuring that all people have an opportunity to reach their God-given potential. This includes seeking ways to address sexual and gender-based violence, climate change and climate-related displacement, and implementing economic empowerment programmes for women and girls. In this way, churches and faith-based organizations are key partners in transforming injustice and ensuring the empowerment of women and girls.

Women and gender-based violence: transforming unjust structures of society

A study by the World Health Organization showed that thirty-five percent of women globally have experienced physical and/or sexual violence. Many more cases go unreported due to shame and stigma. Courageous victims who report to authorities may be traumatised by lack of sensitivity from healthcare workers, police, and court officials. Many cases are not prosecuted and perpetrators are not brought to justice, particularly in conflict-affected countries.

The Anglican Consultative Council has called upon Member Churches to provide leadership on the issue of gender-based violence through education, advocacy, and modelling healthy relationships. Anglicans were among 150 faith leaders convened by the “We Will Speak Out” coalition in South Africa in 2013, where survivors of sexual and gender-based violence expressed their longing for a safe, healing, and inclusive space of refuge within churches.

At the regional and national level, examples of ‘loving service’ include in Fiji, where The House of Sarah has coordinated leaders across nine faith and cultural groups to produce an inspirational multimedia campaign advocating for an end to violence against women and girls. In Brazil, Reverend Elineirde Ferreira established and runs a safe house for women escaping domestic violence.

Hospitality, support, care, and protection for survivors and ending gender-based violence are essential parts of Christian ministry. Religious leaders can speak out against the culture of violence and emphasise the church’s responsibility in fostering a caring and compassionate community, especially during times of conflict and social unrest.

Women and climate change: safeguarding the integrity of creation

The UN Food and Agricultural Organization estimates that women produce half of the world’s food, usually as their main source of income. In the Global South, they produce up to 80%. Climate change has hindered women’s ability to grow food, threatening their economic security and forcing many to migrate in order to survive. A Women’s Environmental Network study showed that women comprise nearly 77% of those displaced by climate change, and UN Women reports that natural disasters increase vulnerability to sexual and gender-based violence.

The Anglican Consultative Council recently passed resolutions committing to enhance its efforts in tackling the causes and consequences of climate change. Affirming that there is a global climate emergency, it emphasized that the voices of indigenous/First Nations women and women who are on the frontlines of climate change must be at the heart of these efforts.

In 2018, the Anglican Women’s Group in Fiji briefed the Archbishop of Canterbury on the impact of rising sea levels and acidification of seawater, which affects women’s ability to participate in fishing and aquaculture, a main source of income. In the Solomon Islands, land loss and increased salinity are putting pressure on crop growth, with communities reporting food shortages. To address the increasing pressure on women in these regions, Anglican Overseas Relief and Development has established a program that assists young women in selling solar lamps in their communities.

Women and economic empowerment: responding to human need by loving service

A 2018 UN Women report highlighted that women remain less likely to participate in the labour market than men. Women's global labour force participation rate is 26.5 percentage points lower than men, and in forty percent of economies, women's entrepreneurial activities face extreme disadvantages. Investing in women's economic empowerment is key to unlocking gender equality and ensuring full participation in God's abundance.

The Anglican Church of South India runs a skills development and entrepreneurship training program for groups across southern India to empower women financially and improve the lives of their families. They opened an outlet in Chennai to sell products produced by hundreds of Dalit and Adivasi Rural Entrepreneurs.

The Anglican Alliance, a global platform for humanitarian relief and development efforts, has successfully established a cooperative for low-income women in the village of Kanaynagar, Bangladesh. Recognizing the diversity and interconnectedness of obstacles for full empowerment, the programme includes training in organization building, leadership development, alternative livelihoods, preventive healthcare, and adaptation technologies to combat climate change.

Recommendations

We urge Member States to:

1. Take urgent and accelerated action to fully implement and finance the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, in partnership with civil society and other stakeholders, including faith-based organisations and faith leaders, as well as implement other vital international agreements affecting the rights of women and girls, including the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, and the Sustainable Development Goals (particularly Goal 5: Gender Equality);
2. Recognise the positive role that faith and communities of faith are playing in the provision of social services, humanitarian response, building resilient communities, promoting well-being, transforming social norms, and achieving gender equality, and consider faith communities as integral partners within civil society;
3. In partnership with all sectors of society, take action to reduce gaps in and remove barriers to the full and equal representation of women in leadership and decision-making at all levels and in all sectors;
4. Design and implement gender-sensitive emergency interventions to mitigate the impacts of climate change and related disasters, with particular focus on meeting the needs of women, girls, the elderly, and persons with disabilities, including incorporating the traditional knowledge of indigenous communities;

5. Incorporate analysis of religious and customary systems in policymaking, and engage collaboratively with faith actors and women, girls, men and boys, to address harmful and discriminatory norms and practices that hinder progress in eliminating all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls;
6. Guarantee fair and equal access to justice for all victims of violence, including through increased support for shelters and other victim support programmes, training of law enforcement officials to ensure appropriate and gender-sensitive responses to reports of domestic violence, providing counselling and reparations for victims of violence, and implementing sexual harassment policies in all institutions of society;
7. Implement legislation and comprehensive legal protection to ensure issues around gender inequality are not treated in isolation, but rather with an acknowledgement of the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination women can experience based on gender, religion, ethnicity, cultural practice, race, socioeconomic status, age, or abilities.