



Socialist International Women

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Implementing parity - a way to peace and development

RESOLUTION

The Socialist International Women (SIW) stands in firm solidarity with all who are experiencing the fear, sorrow and brutalisation that is the grim reality of war and conflict. In our current era of worldwide health, climate and economic un-certainty it is the collective responsibility of all of us across our global community to make every possible effort to promote and maintain peace. Without peace there are no opportunities or resources to develop sustainable communities, which support the nourishing, enriching lives all citizens deserve. In addition, no conflict occurs in isolation; there are always wider consequences, which ultimately affect us all. We are currently witnessing this with the heart-breaking conflict in Ukraine, which is impacting on the world stage on issues including energy security, food security, refugee migration and the re-alignment of political and military allegiances.

Despite the fact that women and girls are never in a position to trigger hostilities, they suffer the deeply damaging consequences of conflict in a wide range of ways. These include rape, sexual violence and assault, degrading and un-sanitary living conditions, lack of pregnancy and childbirth care and the many risks associated with forced migration to escape danger zones and aggressors.

At the heart of SIW's vision for gender equality is the firm belief in the urgent requirement for gender parity in political participation and critical decision making at all levels. There is powerful and compelling evidence of the value of including women in decisions regarding both maintaining peace and facilitating sustainable development. For example, in areas when there has been conflict, research shows that when 35 per cent or more of a country's legislature are women, the risk of a conflict relapse is almost zero^{*1}. There is also evidence that the longer women have been able to vote in a country, the less likely it is that the country will go to war, preferring to resolve disputes with diplomacy instead of aggression^{*1}. And this is not simply a matter of justice and fairness; the potential material gains from a parity approach are immense. One aspect is that the active participation of women has been proven to be enormously valuable in achieving peaceful resolution within on-going conflicts where traditional male-to-male negotiations have repeatedly failed. The often informal 'soft' approaches of women have time and again found common ground and a way forward where previously there was only disagreement and aggression. It has also been estimated that given the opportunity to share their ideas, skills and knowledge women could increase global GDP by US\$12 trillion by 2025. Even if it was just half that amount, this would make truly life-changing differences to the lives of millions of citizens worldwide.

Overall, it is clear that gender parity is without doubt essential to achieving the vision of gender equal, peaceful and sustainable communities. However, globally gender parity in practice remains disappointingly low. For example, between 1999 to 2019 in many instances there were zero women involved in peace negotiations and on average there were 13 per cent of negotiators, 6 per cent of mediators and 6 per cent of signatories to peace agreements compared to men^{*3}. Although there have been encouraging gains made on the political stage, overall the picture is also disappointing and it is currently estimated it will take 130 years to achieve gender equality at the highest levels of power. One of the many reasons for this is that women are often subjected to political violence within the structures of political parties themselves, which pose both formal and informal barriers to their participation. This may be in tangible forms such as gender discriminatory nomination processes and unconcealed violence and oppression, but can also be in more subtle ways which powerfully undermine women's influence^{*5}. The most damaging are traditional patriarchal ideologies, which perpetuate the belief that women are incapable of leadership roles, which can

strongly affect the perception and effectiveness of women's political participation. They can diminish the 'weight' and influence of women's opinions and recommendations, which greatly reduces their impact. In an alarming number of political environments violence against women is also normalised and regarded as a legitimate part of the general cut and thrust of politics⁶. This understandably shakes women's confidence and stops many women from entering politics at all. In addition, some parties do not have any gender specific mechanisms to protect women from violence, or processes in place to ensure that inappropriate behaviour is both penalised and explicitly stated as unacceptable. This too can leave women feeling isolated, vulnerable and un-supported. This inequality of treatment of women compared to men is entirely unacceptable and a continuation of centuries of patriarchal dominance and systemic gender inequality which must be urgently challenged.

There are a number of mechanisms to achieve parity, such as passing legislation to impose gender parity tariffs in elected posts and reviewing governance structures within all public, private and NGO organisations to ensure that parity is encouraged and facilitated. This includes looking at how our own organisation, Socialist International, is governed and reviewing current arrangements to ensure parity at all levels within Socialist International as well as encouraging parity within all of our member parties. There are also very basic elements which can be addressed to support women in practical ways such as providing crèche facilities, accepting alternative ways to participate when needed, such as via video link, and ensuring the personal safety of women in government settings. All of these can send powerful messages to society regarding the value of women to our decision making processes and help re-shape the gender equality narrative to be tangibly inclusive and supportive of women and girls.

The transformative power of women's voices standing in solidarity with each other can be seen in the global effects of the #MeToo movement. #MeToo has empowered millions of women to shake off the fear and shame traditionally attached to violence against women and push it back firmly where it belongs to the male perpetrators guilty of these heinous acts. Women are now demanding to be heard and respected in all aspects of their lives, including on the political stage. This influential wave of energy and intention can and should be proactively harnessed in support of our gender equality goals. The time for radical change in implementing gender parity to promote peace and sustainable development is right now. Working together in solidarity it is entirely possible for us to create a unified message of gender parity at all levels and create the changes we desperately need.

In support of pushing the parity agenda forward and galvanising the political desire to implement change Socialist International Women calls on all of its members, Socialist International (SI) and all affiliated parties and NGOs with similar goals to:

- *Review* and revise where necessary all governance structures, policies and practices at both local and national level within SI and within all member and affiliated entities to ensure implementation of gender parity is explicit and clearly defined at all levels. This is to ensure that in practice the right of women to parity representation and influence is firmly embedded within all political processes.
- *Advocate* strongly for the implementation of gender parity across all decision making processes within all public, private and NGO organisations and include the issue of gender parity as a top priority within all party manifestos and political rhetoric.
- *Confront* systemic gender inequality in all political processes to disrupt outdated dysfunctional patriarchal norms which damage and diminish the status and influence of women wherever they appear. This includes any practices which forbid women from voting or holding senior political roles.
- *Insist* on parity inclusion of women with men in all peace negotiation processes and as signatories, as well as involvement with post conflict recovery initiatives to ensure that gender specific issues are appropriately addressed and to enable women to contribute their invaluable perspectives.