

**Prepared by:** *Ismini Mangafas* for Repro Uncensored

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## Executive Summary

The United Nations Commission on the Status of Women convened its 70<sup>th</sup> conference, dubbed CSW70, in March of 2026 at the New York City headquarters. At the meetings were government representatives, youth delegates, scholars, advocates, activists, and other civil society actors to address this year's priority theme: "strengthening access to justice for women and girls, including by promoting inclusive and equitable legal systems, eliminating discriminatory laws, policies, and practices, and addressing structural barriers," [as listed](#) on the UN's website.

The report situates the discussions around this theme in the broader context of CSW70's consequential vote: the March 9 adoption of the Agreed Conclusions by majority vote rather than consensus, which was also a first for the Commission. Although the United States opposed the document and sought unsuccessful amendments, it passed decisively. That vote stands as both a substantive and symbolic marker of international commitment to gender equality, even as participation in subsequent meetings raises questions about diplomatic priorities and the visibility of engagement.

A central through-line of the report is that "women's issues" and "girls' issues" are not isolated issues at all. Measures that improve women's and girls' access to justice – whether through legal and medical aid, disability-inclusive reform, digital rights and liberties, or economic autonomy – produce widespread social benefits. They strengthen children's welfare, families' resilience, workforce capacity, and national development.

At the same time, the report cautions that progress remains fragile. Gender-equality frameworks can be advanced institutionally yet destabilized by unemployment, poverty, conflict, backlash, and the erosion of civic space, including through digital censorship and surveillance. Durable justice requires not only formal rights, but also social, economic, and political conditions that allow those rights to be enjoyed and become culturally entrenched.

## Emerging Technologies and Digital Rights

The report identifies emerging technologies as one of the conference's most important themes. Across both meetings, participants agreed that artificial intelligence and digital systems have immense potential both to expand and to obstruct justice. Technology can widen access to legal information, court processes, and protective services, but it can also

reproduce historical bias, intensify surveillance, and create new channels for violence, exploitation, and exclusion.

Examples of positive innovation included online protection-order systems in South Africa and free legal aid directories with chatbot assistance in the Philippines. Yet speakers also stressed the dangers of a digital divide becoming an “AI divide.” Speakers warned that AI trained on patriarchal data will reproduce those hierarchies unless subjected to transparent bias audits, independent oversight, and stronger fairness standards.

Speakers further emphasized that digitized justice systems can require people, especially youth, to surrender privacy and digital autonomy in exchange for access. Youth delegates called for safer digital platforms, youth-designed reporting systems, stronger protections against surveillance and online abuse, and accountability for tech companies alongside national and global regulation. Lastly, contemporary digital public squares carry their own risks for censorship.

## **Shrinking Civic Space**

A second major theme is the global and growing reduction of civic space, physical and digital arenas in which people can exercise free expression.

Youth speakers described shrinking civic space as a core obstacle to justice, especially for young activists. Transnational digital connections still allow youth to share strategies, observe one another’s struggles, and organize across borders. However, restrictive laws, surveillance, intimidation, de-platforming, hostile policing, and the narrowing of safe spaces for assembly all reduce the ability of youth as well as feminist organizations to organize, advocate, and influence decision-making.

Civil society organizations often fill gaps left by state institutions by providing legal aid, support services, and community advocacy; when such groups are targeted or forced to close, vulnerable populations lose key channels of protection and recourse.

## **Healthcare, Including Physical, Mental, Sexual, and Reproductive Healthcare**

Healthcare, especially sexual and reproductive healthcare, emerged as another central theme, though participants approached it unevenly. The report highlights a recurring contradiction: some countries described positive reforms in sexual and reproductive health while still maintaining abortion restrictions or criminal penalties. These penalties not only impede bodily autonomy but contribute to maternal mortality and pressure on families as well as social safety nets.

Examples of healthcare reforms and initiatives included Brazil’s Menstrual Dignity Program and Mauritania’s recognition of family planning as a right. Several states, including Belize, South Africa, Chad, and Kenya, described one-stop centers and recovery services for

survivors of violence, integrating medical, legal, and psycho-social support. Representatives from NGOs in the meetings also emphasized mental health and psycho-social care as essential dimensions of justice.

The report underscores that, across hours of discussion, “health” was invoked often while “abortion” was mentioned twice. This contrast is revealing. The only explicit defense of abortion access came from a civil society speaker who argued that there can be no true justice so long as women and girls are criminalized for exercising reproductive rights.

## **Corrosive Ideologies and Anti-Rights Movements**

A substantial portion of the report is devoted to the role of corrosive ideologies in constraining justice. These include patriarchal interpretations of religion, paternalistic conceptions of women as fragile or incompetent, and coordinated anti-rights movements seeking to reverse gains in gender equality.

The report includes remarks from Marwa Sharafeldin, who explains that religion often functions not simply as theology but as a site of political struggle over power, law, family, and norms. This requires a multi-layered approach: engaging with the institutions shaping customs, contributing egalitarian perspectives to religious discourse, and supporting feminist civil society organizations, which are among the strongest drivers of policy change over time.

Youth speakers extended this analysis to anti-rights movements, describing them as organized, well-financed, transnational, and strategically effective at using misinformation, panic, and polarization. Their targets include bodily autonomy, trans rights, comprehensive sexual education, and broader feminist protections. Coalition-building, clearer movement narratives, and solidarity across constituencies are essential responses.

## **Conflict and Crisis**

Conflict is presented as a force multiplier of injustice. Under conditions of conflict, people and children, especially women and girls, face greater obstacles to safety, legal recourse, education, economic independence, and participation in public life. The report highlights speakers from Sudan, Ukraine, Haiti, and Cuba who presented examples of distinct but overlapping crisis contexts.

Particularly striking is an example from Sudan, where feminist legal networks helped overturn death sentences, secure acquittals, and respond rapidly to arbitrary detention and false accusations under wartime conditions. These interventions show how organized feminist infrastructure can tangibly expand access to justice even under extreme circumstances.

The report also notes that international justice infrastructure is itself vulnerable to political pressure, as illustrated by travel restrictions that prevented some participants from attending CSW70 and by broader efforts to undermine international accountability mechanisms. The

conclusion is clear: feminist networks, both women-led and youth-led, are crucial for building peace and security foundations of justice.

## **Funding and Institutional Inclusion of Feminist and Youth-Led Movements**

Another major theme is that feminist women-led and youth-led organizations are among the most effective agents of justice reform. Speakers repeatedly argued that when feminist-led networks, including those led by youth, are involved in designing programs, raising awareness for legal rights, and promoting social and economic participation, access to justice improves measurably. These groups close the gap between law and practice, mobilize communities, and hold institutions accountable.

Yet these movements remain underfunded, especially when youth-led. Speakers emphasized the need for direct, flexible, and long-term funding as well as stronger institutional support. They also stressed that participation must be structurally embedded rather than consultative: youth and feminist actors should be incorporated into governance, monitoring, policy review, due diligence, and data collection. Their inclusion makes institutions more literate, responsive, trusted, and forward-looking.

## **Access to Justice Beyond the Courtroom**

Speakers repeatedly demonstrated how justice exists before, after, and outside of a courtroom. Rights must be known, believed in, and socially reinforced in homes, schools, workplaces, communities, and civic spaces. Legal entitlements can mean little if women are pressured by custom not to exercise them.

Participants described varied approaches to expanding justice beyond formal institutions: Serbia's national diagnostic surveys, Burundi's radio programs, Spain's financial support for under-resourced victims of injustice, school-based legal education, arts and literature, community outreach, local-language information sessions, Cote d'Ivoire's mobile teams, mentorship, and collaboration between governments and NGOs. The report includes additional examples from other countries and NGOs which are already in practice, underway, or under consideration.

Education, both formal and informal, is portrayed as especially foundational. Correspondingly, schools and youth programs become early sites for either reproducing or dismantling inequality.

## **Legal-System Reform, Disability Inclusion, and Economic as well as Climate Justice**

Across both meetings, speakers described legal reforms aimed at creating specialized courts and police units, improving survivor-centered responses, modernizing penal codes, recognizing digital violence, and increasing access to affordable, including free, legal aid. Gender-sensitive training for judges, police, and court personnel emerged as a recurring

priority, as did efforts to expand child-centered protections and recognize children's legal standing.

The report highlights disability inclusion as an essential dimension of justice. Women and girls with disabilities face barriers stemming from inaccessible procedures, prejudice, lack of legal aid, and denial of legal capacity. Reform must therefore align with disability rights standards, prioritize equal access to services, and include women with disabilities in designing and monitoring justice systems.

Speakers also treated employment as a justice issue. Women face barriers through unemployment, exclusionary laws or norms, and exploitation in informal labor. Youth speakers, especially from Kenya and Burundi, stressed the scale of the coming employment crisis and the need for proactive investment in skills, entrepreneurship, and financial inclusion. Economic justice is not separate from gender justice but one of its central conditions.

Lastly, speakers discussed climate justice and collective well-being as essential components of justice overall. Legal aid must include economic support for climate stewardship by communities who are most impacted by climate-related disasters, yet who also contribute least to the global crisis.

## **Conclusion**

Justice is fundamentally intersectional and multidimensional. Across discussions of technology, climate, conflict, labor, disability, healthcare, and legal reform, two values recurred: dignity and autonomy.

The strongest initiatives described at CSW70 are those that planned for cross-sector scalability, were tailor-made, and recognized women and girls not as isolated categories but as full human beings embedded in families, communities, politics, economies, and ecosystems.

A broad takeaway of the conference was that expanding access to justice for women and girls strengthens justice for all. And the reverse is also true: where conflict spreads, civic space shrinks, economies deteriorate, or anti-rights ideologies gain ground, women and girls join their societies in feeling the consequences, and are often among the first to do so.

The path forward therefore requires not only legal reform, but sustained will, imagination, feminist leadership, and material investment in the conditions that make rights real.

## Report of Key Themes of CSW70

### Background

The United Nations Commission on the Status of Women convened a two-week session in March of 2026 – abbreviated as CSW70, reflecting the conference’s 70<sup>th</sup> year – at the United States headquarters in New York City. This annual programming assembles thousands of scholars, advocates, professionals, activists, and government representatives from around the world, aiming to amass a multidisciplinary body that will diagnose, dissect, and offer solutions to the most pressing transnational challenges facing women and girls – and, by extension, broader society.

This year’s central topic, officially termed the priority theme, was “ensuring and strengthening access to justice for all women and girls, including by promoting inclusive and equitable legal systems, eliminating discriminatory laws, policies, and practices, and addressing structural barriers.”

The two-week session included both main and side events addressing the range of intersectional and multidimensional issues related to accessing justice. On 17 March 2026, two meetings were held to address the priority theme. One meeting was among government representatives, while the other brought together youth delegates from various member states. Both meetings, broadcast on the [UN’s online video platform](#), featured panelists and participants from civil society, including non-governmental organizations (NGOs) related to the topic.

Although the meetings shared overlapping points with one another, there were also some differences in what was emphasized. For example, youth speakers conveyed a heightened sense of urgency, often explicitly framing current conditions as critical. They named anti-rights movements as key forces undermining progress on gender equality. And some speakers, such as the youth delegate from Kenya, contended that rising unemployment and joblessness, which can threaten foundational social progress, should be a core action item. As youth speakers described initiatives to improve women’s and girls’ access to justice across contexts, they also stressed the need to fund youth-led justice movements, incorporate youth into governance and institutional design, and defend civic space.

Several governments have, if their reports are taken at face value, made notable strides in expanding the capacity, accessibility, and responsiveness of their institutions in combating what are often framed as “women’s issues” or “girls’ issues,” including legal and social discrimination, economic dependence, and physical and sexual violence. These steps include access to legal services online, specialized intervention teams with round-the-clock support and remote access, and legal reform. Almost every country whose representatives spoke in

the meeting emphasized public campaigns to raise awareness of human rights and how to access them. Some representatives also reaffirmed the need to incorporate international laws into domestic law or described ongoing efforts to do so.

Based on the UN's online broadcast, neither meeting hall appeared to be full, although the youth meeting seemed more populated, even accounting for remote participation. That raises a question: where was everyone?

One answer is that there are [45 countries at a time](#) on the Commission for the Status of Women, who are replaced when their terms expire. Representatives of those governments had already participated in a key CSW70 meeting the previous week. On 9 March 2026, they gathered to adopt a set of Agreed Conclusions, a document which consolidated shared positions and priorities on gender equality. Notably, the document was adopted by majority vote rather than the usual consensus. The adoption was met with applause.

Present at that meeting, however, were also detractors, most notably the government representative of the United States. First, he [requested a recorded vote](#) on the document – an uncommon procedural move – after [several amendments](#) he proposed to alter the Agreed Conclusions failed to pass. The recorded vote, however, resulted in 37 countries in favor, 6 abstentions, and only 1 – the United States – against. [According to](#) Outright International, feminist civil society organizations collaborated “in the final hours before the vote [to urge] Member States of the UN to adopt the Agreed Conclusions ‘as drafted’ and to reject attempts to amend, delete or dilute them.”

While all meetings are important, formal decision-making sessions – particularly those involving votes – carry additional significance. Diplomatic delegations may therefore attend selectively depending on priorities. Limited visibility in UN broadcasts or lack of speaking participation does not necessarily indicate absence, and attendance at topical discussions is not mandatory. However, observers may reasonably expect visible participation from member state representatives.

In discussing the priority theme, the youth meeting was, in some respects, more dynamic, as participants were less constrained by the politics of representing a government. Youth panelists, delegates, and NGO representatives were scholars, activists, professionals, and movement leaders. Perhaps viewing the youth meetings in action can serve as a reality check, discrediting narratives that participation in public discourse requires seniority.

Given that the meetings' initiatives and calls to action expand access to justice more broadly – ranging from online legal services that overcome geographical and occupational barriers to strengthened legal rights for persons with disabilities – it is clear that “women's issues” and “girls' issues” are not really isolated to women and girls. Solutions may arise from gender-specific challenges, but their application is typically equal opportunity. Individuals outside these groups also benefit from reforms designed to address barriers to justice. Most importantly, it benefits children.

Additionally, government representatives cited statistics that in their countries, in other countries, or in aggregate, removing structural barriers to women's socioeconomic participation resulted in a more robust workforce, a more dynamic economy, and more stability within families. A country in which half of the population is barred or discouraged from contributing to its labor or economic activity is one with systematically unfulfilled potential. A family in which both parents are legally and normatively autonomous adults is a family in which children benefit from two full parents who can serve as role models, providers, teachers, and even emergency responders; simultaneously, both adults – the would-be patriarch and infantilized woman – instead benefit from the emotional, physical, and practical gains of equal partnership.

While laudable and necessary, the process of achieving and implementing gender equality can be fragile. The predicament raised by the youth delegate from Kenya is a key concern. Countries can optimize their gender equality national frameworks, but without economic prospects, to what extent can anyone, including women and girls, enjoy a dignified quality of life? What is the point of replacing sexist violence with the violence of poverty? And, lastly, in the event of growing joblessness, rising unemployment, and worsening poverty, women and girls are likely to suffer first, if not most. When periods of social change are closely timed with widespread financial disempowerment, norms can quickly, often followed by laws, revert to what they were before. Only this time, women and girls aren't just subjugated on the basis of their sex and gender – they join society in experiencing broader impoverishment.

The concept of mutual benefit and gender equality's inherent worth played separate roles underpinning discussions. For example, the macroeconomic case for women's equal economic participation is strong. On the other hand, the moral case for legally enshrining women's bodily autonomy is strong. As expected, government representatives listed what their countries have achieved in promoting gender equality and what, if anything, is next – and, as noted earlier, many recaps contained creative, efficacious, and reproducible tactics. The government representative from Cuba proposed an idea about information-sharing methods: to create a "clearinghouse," as later paraphrased by a panelist, of what countries are implementing or testing, so others can consider it in real time.

Several themes arose as essential topics of the conference, some of which appeared in both meetings but varied in terms of depth or approach. Others arose only in one. The youth meeting included some topics that were minimally addressed, if at all, in the government meeting. On the other hand, the government meeting included a wider body of exemplary successful structural improvements, including, in some cases, practical examples of possible solutions to problems youth delegates had discussed. This highlights the need for systematic feedback and collaboration between governments and youth leaders, who are often at the forefront of human rights movements and tangibly closest to underlying causes of systemic social injustice.

## **The first major theme is that of emerging technologies and digital rights.**

Speakers across both meetings converged on one key takeaway: while artificial intelligence (AI) has enormous potential for good, it also has enormous potential for harm. These harms can be multi-fold: environmental, tied to the infrastructure of AI processing, such as through impacts on the water supply; institutional, if what machines learn and subsequently replicate is historically and contemporaneously false, misleading, or biased; and personal, if digital ecosystems amplify or even expand the means through which people, and especially children, are targeted for acts of injustice, including exploitation, harassment, doxxing, and violence.

Some governments have used the internet and technological inventions in clearly innovative and positive ways. The Philippines has created a “free legal aid directory [for use] anywhere in the [country] which is accompanied by a chatbot that [provides] basic legal information.” Residents of South Africa can file for orders of protection online, and these orders can be served to the recipients online as well, including through delivery on the messaging software WhatsApp “no later than 24 hours” after such an order has been issued.

In some ways, these methods can directly mitigate many of the barriers that have impeded women’s access to justice. For example, online access to legal institutions and free or affordable legal aid subverts traditionally prohibitive factors like cost, entrapment, and geographic isolation.

These aforementioned examples fall into two technological categories, supportive and replacement. Their functions, which are implied by their names, were detailed by Tania Sourdin, a panelist in the government meeting. The first type helps increase people’s independence, through services such as translating languages, procuring and explaining information, and offering guidance, like the chatbot in the Philippines. The second type consists of functional substitutes, directly providing goods and services. Sourdin mentioned online courts in China, where people have already attended court hearings or completed legal processes online; South Africa’s digital handling of court orders is one more example. Digital banking would be another.

There’s also a third category, according to Sourdin, encompassing disruptive technologies. These include wearable devices, like smartwatches and clothing sensors that monitor vital signs; exoskeletons that enable people to walk without use of their limbs; and augmented reality headsets, already in use by militaries for targeting and striking maneuvers. Belonging to one category is not mutually exclusive with belonging to another.

While, as the youth delegate from Sweden acknowledged, “technology can expand access to information and support” and “states must therefore invest in digital literacy and equitable access,” speakers voiced concerns that technology could also impede development, rights, and liberties. Sourdin and two other panelists in the government meeting, Teresa Zapeta and Ranjita de Silva de Alwis, each referenced the digital divide, a phenomenon which reflects

women's reduced access to technology compared to that of men. Due to laws and norms alike, women and girls can be less exposed to environments and activities that promote digital literacy and, in more extreme cases, prevented from engaging with or owning technology at all.

In fact, de Silva de Alwis cautioned against enabling the digital divide to become “the growing AI divide” and entrenching gender discrimination as “omnipresent and ubiquitous” through large language models whose training inputs that involve “historically biased data sets” and AI development in which women, especially those from the Global South, are underrepresented. According to de Silva de Alwis, “data bias, algorithmic bias, and development bias compound discriminatory policies against women,” and result in “coded biases” that “will continue to shape women's lives and be amplified as well as reproduced.”

Sourdin also mentioned potential threats of emerging technologies to personal freedoms, many of which were echoed by participants in the youth meeting. She warned against coercive control and surveillance. A representative from Associação de Jovens Engajamundo, an NGO in Brazil, emphasized the reach of those harms, explaining: “the landscape of injustice is evolving. Technology facilitates gender-based violence. Online harassment and digital surveillance increasingly silence young voices and restrict civic participation.”

The youth representative from Stating Choice for Youth and Sexuality echoed these concerns, stating, “as justice systems move online, [barriers] evolve,” and specifying that “youth access becomes mediated by digital infrastructures that concentrate authority over data and identity. Young people are asked to disclose intimate info without meaningful agency over how it's stored or shared.” As a result, accessing justice may require “surrendering digital autonomy” as a tradeoff.

The youth speaker from Men Engage Global Alliance also foreshadowed that “patriarchy is not disappearing, but adapting,” and raised additional concerns about the use of AI in judicial systems, explaining that algorithms trained on “historical patriarchal data” will project that bias into tasks and processes. He proposed one solution as “mandating transparent gender bias audits for all judicial technology, with independent oversight by feminist and youth-led organizations.”

Another solution, proposed by Oona Kurppa, youth panelist and delegate from Finland, is a twofold approach that holds tech companies accountable for moderating and eliminating abuse on their platforms, while “national and global standards ensure algorithms are fair and address structural inequalities.” The youth delegate from Sweden further specified they must “[safeguard] against bias, surveillance, censorship, and other harms.”

Additionally, the youth representative from Stating Choice for Youth and Sexuality said governments and organizations should “create secure national digital platforms providing accessible legal information and confidential reporting mechanisms designed with youth.” Part

of the need for youth involvement is to support the legitimacy of justice systems, which “erodes” when youth, a large component of societies, “are systematically excluded from both accessing justice and shaping justice institutions.”

**Several youth delegates who listed surveillance as a harm of emerging technologies did so in relation to “shrinking civic space,” another core theme.**

Even though shrinking civic space was mentioned by Sima Sami Bahous, Executive Director of UN Women, in her opening remarks, and has been on ongoing point of investigation by organizations like Amnesty International, European Civic Forum, ACT Alliance, INCLO, and Civicus Monitor, no speakers in the government meeting – neither panelists nor representatives – evoked it, unlike several participants in the youth meeting.

Civic space is any environment, whether digital like a platform or physical like a park, in which individuals within a population can enact what Civicus Monitor [describes as](#) their “fundamental rights to associate, assemble peacefully, and freely express views and opinions,” which are “the three key rights that civil society depends upon.” Civicus Monitor [elaborates that](#) “civic space is the bedrock of any open and democratic society” through which people can “claim their rights and influence the political and social structures around them.”

However, civic spaces around the world, as democracies backslide and authoritarian governments entrench themselves further, face mounting threats, ranging from laws and policies that penalize free expression to political violence that provokes a chilling effect. Other forms of censorship include de-platforming activists; algorithmic bias that obscures or shadow-bans content; state control or coercion of the press and universities; and governmental barriers to physical gatherings, such as curfews, domestic militarization, weaponization of police against protesters, hostile architecture, and closures of public spaces.

Ekaterine Muzashvili, youth panelist from Georgia, explained that, through civic space, “civil society organizations (CSOs) have filled critical gaps left by the state institutions,” assisting vulnerable people by providing essential services, such as legal counsel. But, she said, “increasing restrictions on civil society organizations, combined with political and regulatory pressures,” have led to closures of the same CSOs that have historically protected people, including children.

Rania Hogga, youth panelist from Morocco, listed shrinking civic space as one of “three major challenges that undermine the youth-led justice movement,” alongside anti-feminist backlash and lack of funds. She noted that “shrinking civic space continues to limit the ability of young activists to organize, express themselves, and participate meaningfully in decision-making,” amplifying the effects of “restrictive laws, surveillance, and intimidation” – and leading to safety threats as options for assembly narrow. The result is “an environment where youth voices are marginalized rather than empowered.”

Despite the exponential shrinkage of civic space, the online space, with its own challenges of censorship, can still be a powerful connector. The youth delegate from Norway noted, “we see each challenge – each other’s struggles, we share ideas, and we organize across borders, cultures, and communities.”

In the youth meeting’s closing remarks, Dr. Felipe Paullier, a physician from Uruguay, framed shrinking civic space as contradictory to protecting the rights of young activists. There is “tech-facilitated harassment and violence, which is mainly affecting young women and girls, and this is directly [affecting their] ability to engage in justice processes.” Paullier concluded that “conditions under which every young person can organize and can advocate” is a “prerequisite for access to justice.”

### **The third major theme was healthcare, including sexual and reproductive.**

Due to laws and norms designed and maintained by religious, legal, and sociopolitical institutions, the definition of healthcare – particularly sexual and reproductive healthcare – was not uniform among participants. Even though Ranjita de Silva de Alwis issued the reminder that “while the right to culture is a fundamental right, it cannot violate the right to gender equality,” women continue to face denials of their sexual and reproductive healthcare rights. Female citizens and residents of countries with commitments to sexual and reproductive healthcare are forbidden to terminate a pregnancy, with barriers and criminal penalties that anti-rights activists have been striving to worsen.

Nonetheless, some countries, including those that prohibit abortion, have, based on their descriptions, made positive strides in separate areas of sexual and reproductive healthcare. These initiatives warrant a look. They can signal opportunities for reproducibility in other jurisdictions, offer examples of harm reduction, and prompt discourse on what cultural values might propel improvements in one area of sexual and reproductive healthcare while stymieing them in another.

One such instance is that of Brazil, where abortion illegality is a leading factor of maternal mortality, and where criminalizing and stigmatizing abortion further has been a goal of anti-rights activists. At the same time, the youth delegate from Brazil shared that the Ministry of Women and the Ministry of Health have promoted a Menstrual Dignity Program, whose purpose includes addressing menstrual poverty. Inaccessible or unavailable hygienic products, such as pads and tampons, afflicts people of all ages all over the world.

Moreover, openly and explicitly engaging with menstruation publicly can be discouraged across cultures and socioeconomic statuses, with false and degrading assumptions ranging from women as emotionally crippled to menstrual bleeding as dirty and grotesque. By addressing menstruation openly at the UN as well as in their own country and taking steps to improve women’s and girls’ menstrual dignity, Brazil subverted a common and damaging taboo.

Efforts in Mauritania are another example of progress. The government representative discussed several kinds of institutional reform, including a “national observatory for the protection of women’s rights and girls’ rights.” According to Mauritania’s government representative, its institutions are focused on combating child marriage and female genital mutilation.

Although the breadth of Mauritania’s 2017 law that established family planning as a fundamental right is limited by other parts of the penal code – which ban abortion and impose punishments on individuals who provide or receive one – steps to protect children from marriage and genital mutilation are indisputably serious and laudable.

Additionally, the government representatives of several countries, including Belize, South Africa and Chad – in all three of which abortion is mostly or entirely unrestricted, especially early in a pregnancy – described developing one-stop treatment centers for survivors and victims of violence, in which medical (and sometimes social and legal) services are holistically provided. The representative from Chad specified that “medical treatment includes emergency care as well as [...] treatment for physical trauma and prevention of infection.” Additionally, the government representative of Kenya, where abortion is mostly restricted, mentioned “gender-based violence recovery centers.”

Beyond somatic care, some speakers also discussed the need for psychological care. The youth delegate from Cote d’Ivoire said, “it’s crucial to incorporate the psycho-social dimension into programs [with] the support of community leaders and mobile teams.” In Cote d’Ivoire’s case, this is undertaken through a collaborative effort between the delegate’s foundation, the Ministry of Women, Families, and Children, and the Ministry of Health. The government representative of Morocco also included “[providing] psycho-social support for women through shelters and centers” as one of 14 “legal and institutional mechanisms” implemented or pursued by the Moroccan government to support women and girls. The youth delegate from Uganda, along with Nauna Revo, youth panelist and delegate from Solomon Islands, also emphasized the need for psycho-social services.

Across both meetings – four-and-a-half hours in total – the word “health” was used at least 21 times, while “abortion” just twice. In fact, the only speaker to mention abortion explicitly was the representative from Catholic Women for the Right to Choose, who argued that sexual and reproductive healthcare includes abortion, which, she pointed out, is under threat even in countries where it is legalized. She tied this threat to the growing influence of religious actors in even secular countries’ governmental institutions and remarked that “there will be no true justice until or as long as women and girls continue to be criminalized for exercising their rights.”

## **The fourth major theme of the discussions was the role of corrosive ideologies on human rights, civic participation, and access to justice.**

As with the prior theme, how various participants in the UN meetings define a “corrosive ideology” might differ due to the diverse pool of cultural ethics and customs that comprise the global community. At the same time, more fundamental to humanity than normative variance – which is neither static nor predetermined – are natural rights, the basis of a universal human rights framework like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, ratified by the UN in 1948. While societal administrators arbitrate specifics, nothing they arbitrate should conflict with a natural right. Yet these conflicts are the reason for meetings like the CSW70.

One primary kind of corrosive ideology is that of “patriarchal interpretations of religious texts that see male superiority, authority, and guardianship over women as a sacrosanct religious edict that has to be followed by all,” according to Marwa Sharafeldin, a panelist in the government meeting. Although her scholarly work focuses on the intersection of international human rights law and feminist activism with Islamic law, these interpretations are evident across religions through institutions and norms that subordinate women. Therefore, “when working for real access to justice,” Sharafeldin explains, “it is almost impossible not to address religion, with its diversity of discourses, that range from patriarchal, to egalitarian, in its very locations of institutional power.”

Another pervasive mentality that promotes legal and normative subjugation is that of women as “fragile and incompetent,” according to Ranjita de Silva de Alwis, “resulting in their over-protection and exclusion.”

The representative from Catholic Women for the Right to Choose addressed the role of religion in abortion restrictions and public policy at-large, tying it to the broader disenfranchisement of women and girls. From her work in Latin America and the Caribbean, she described a “persistent interference of religious instances in the legal mechanisms of our region,” injecting “patriarchal, religious, racist, and, more or less, biases that reproduce stigma and violence, which is an obstacle to the full enjoyment of human rights.” She connected this interference by “religious actors that would like to impose their specific beliefs” to the use of authority and “economic and political power [to] weaken democratic institutions and persecute social and popular movements.”

To that end, Sharafeldin presented a number of tactics for overriding that influence.

One is a “multi-layered” approach involving “systematic, structural, and institutional efforts” that are “cognizant of power relations” and directed towards the entities “shaping gender norms, which are religion, family, law, and [the] state.” Why? According to Sharafeldin, “in many parts of the world, social norms are part of a fierce competition over concrete interests with strong actors vying against one another for dominance and control over resources and power. They use religion as well as social and legal norms governing women’s bodies and lives to maximize their interests institutionally.” The process might be long, even take years,

but success results from “persistent, concerted actions, organization, and mobilization by feminist movements, coalitions, and communities of people working together with these institutions and sometimes putting pressure on them.”

Second, “serious critical and constructive engagement with religious discourse [that] argues for gender equality and justice” is necessary. When religion is used to advance state or special interests on the institutional level, it is “not a matter of theology anymore, but rather one of politics and power, which eventually affects whether a patriarchal or egalitarian religious discourse is favored and selected [...] to affect social norms and laws influencing gender relations.” As a result, “engaging with religion is fundamental.” However, it is not sufficient independently and instead needs to be part of a “holistic framework of action that also includes human rights standards, constitutional guarantees of equality, [and] the lived realities of women, men, and families.”

Third, support, invest in, and accelerate the work of “feminist civil society organizations and women’s movements” which themselves have a “proven track record of success.” Sharafeldin’s research, which “[analyzed] successful measures taken to address violence against women in 70 states over 30 years,” found that “the most important and consistent factor driving policy change is feminist activism.” Feminist activism, according to Sharafeldin, is so effective because feminists more readily accept the risks and labor associated with pursuing social change, whether through research, advocacy, activism, or applying sociopolitical pressure; additionally, feminists have played the important role of mediators between “often conflicting stakeholders and discourses, connecting the global with the local and vice-versa.” This has made feminists instrumental to social change and legal reform.

These tactics can be applied directly as well as modified to combat other corrosive ideologies. Another ideology discussed at the conference was that of the anti-rights movement, sometimes synonymous with gender backlash or gender pushback. Speakers at the youth meeting used all three terms; those at the government meeting did not use any.

At the youth meeting, Director Bahous observed that “backlash is growing. The headwinds are getting stronger. Hard won progress is under threat.” This sentiment was shared by youth panelist Rania Hogga, who named “backlash against gender equality” one of the greatest challenges for youth-led justice movements, and by the delegate from Sweden, who expressed that “progress is stalling and in some places reversing. Even here at the CSW, we witness growing backlash against rights that previous generations fought so hard to secure.” The youth delegate from Norway echoed this point, saying “it’s a troubling reality when rights that were once considered secure are being questioned, weakened, and rolled back.”

Hogga diagnosed some of the factors perpetuating or reinforcing gender backlash as “misinformation, political resistance, and social polarization.” The youth delegate from Denmark added additional factors: in addition to being “very well-financed” and “well-organized,” the “anti-rights movement are doing a really good job at painting a clear

picture of the world they want – one that young people are watching and some have started to lean in.”

Another speaker in the youth meeting, Anna, representing Gay Global Action for Trans Equality, characterized the anti-rights movement as “a coordinated network sharing strategies and resources across countries,” according to transnational research conducted by the organization. She explained that their main tactics include “[spreading] disinformation across social media and [generating] a public panic.”

Anna elaborated that the goals of the anti-rights movement include “[criminalizing] trans identity, [blocking] gender affirming care, [denying] legal recognition, and [reversing] protections that took decades to build.” In some instances, civil society organizations, especially those relating to trans rights, have reported having to cancel events or even permanently close due to threats. The youth delegate from the Netherlands also listed some of the targets of “gender pushback, growing online misogyny, and the anti-rights movement” as “bodily autonomy, comprehensive sexual education, and sexual and reproductive health.”

However, the youth delegate from Denmark also offered a point of countering these systemic as well as grassroots attacks: “we must [...] start painting a much bigger and much clearer picture of the world that we want to build. One that young people can see themselves in, feel safe in, and want to join in the fight for.” Anna did as well, noting the importance of unity for a strong coalition, expressing that “the anti-gender movement attacking trans rights are [also the ones] restricting women’s bodily autonomy and [dismantling] feminism. When trans-women are excluded from feminist spaces, we weaken the very coalition we would need to win.”

### **The fifth major theme was the role of conflict, which often intensifies existing harms, amplifies injustices, and halts momentum for progress.**

The damaging effect of conflict on women’s and girls’ ability to navigate legal systems, receive education, achieve financial independence, participate in civil society, and generally exercise their human rights was not understated in either meeting. Although not mentioned as frequently as other motifs, the presentations on conflict contained depth. Closing remarks for both meetings recognized conflict as a highly extenuating circumstance that impedes individuals’ immediate access to rights, not least among which is the right to life; conflict also erodes the landscape of rights overall.

The government meeting heard from Faizat Badmus-Busari, representing Strategic Initiative for Women in the Horn of Africa (SIHA), who provided detailed insights on feminist interventions against false arrests, arbitrary detentions, and state executions in a conflict-related context. Since April 2023, residents of Sudan have been facing civil war, displacement, and genocide, of which one belligerent, the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), has been accused by international courts. The contemporary genocide mirrors a prior genocide which killed hundreds of thousands and displaced millions between 2003 and 2005.

In that landscape, Badmus-Busari explained, women have been overcriminalized under the penal code's morality provisions, following accusations such as collaborating with enemies during wartime.

In Sudan, unknown scores of women have been arrested on false or dubious grounds, including with charges that carry the death penalty. In response, "feminist networks such as SIHA are bringing together women's lawyers, mediators, and [...] paralegals." The impact was immediate, with hundreds of women acquitted and "13 [having] the death sentence overturned." According to Badmus-Busari, these outcomes demonstrate an important lesson: "access to justice improves when women-led legal networks are organized, supported, and able to act quickly." Although these observations occurred in a conflict context, they can be generalized to any landscape with opportunities to act on women's behalves.

Moreover, across the Horn, breaking the cycle of violence and impunity requires "not only legal frameworks but sustained support for [...] women's organizations and feminist-led networks," who "[document] violations, [support] survivors through legal processes, and [push] institutions to act." This characterization about the efficacy of feminist organizations echoes Marwa Sharafeldin's description, as does one of the priority actions stated by Badmus-Busari for the UN and its member states: to "invest directly in women-led organizations, legal aid organizations, and feminist-led networks." Badmus-Busari also called for "[strengthening] the accountability mechanisms for women and girls, particularly in conflicts and fragile settings."

The government representative from Ukraine addressed the impacts of conflict as well, saying that women's and girls' access to justice in a conflict-related context is about "dignity, security, and the restoration of justice." Since 2014, Ukraine and Russia have been direct belligerents on opposite sides of an armed conflict most likely aimed at regime change in Ukraine and annexing Ukrainian national territory. Since 2022, the conflict has escalated with Russia occupying about 20% of Ukraine.

The representative explained that "the war has [...] intensified existing gender inequalities and created new risks for women and girls, including increased conflict-related sexual violence." She pointed out that women continue to live multidimensional lives, contributing to national security, families and communities, childcare, eldercare, and caring for survivors and victims of war.

"Despite the war," she continued, "ensuring equal rights and opportunities for women and men remains a priority of Ukraine's public policy." The Ukrainian government and civil society have played roles in passing legislation, expanding legal aid access, and supporting survivors of violence, with one NGO "creating recovery spaces, providing psychological and social support, [developing] education programs, and strengthening women's economic empowerment."

Wendy Isaac, representing Women’s Center for Legal Aid and Counseling in South Africa, spoke at the government meeting to note the absence of “Palestinian feminist organizations that had planned to participate” and presumably shed light on their perspectives of “occupation, siege, and systemic discrimination.” However, they could not attend because “the [United States] expanded its travel ban to include holders of Palestinian passports alongside nationals of dozens of countries.” Participants from these countries, many in the Global South, which have been “affected by colonial legacies and ongoing human rights violations,” have therefore been unable to contribute to the discussion about women and girls experiencing conflict.

Moreover, Isaac noted a troubling marriage of incidents. Just as many would-be or planned participants, some of whom are among the most affected by international human rights violations, were barred from the United States – and therefore the UN’s headquarters in New York City – “we have witnessed a troubling pattern of political pressure targeting international justice mechanisms,” such as “sanctions imposed on the [International Criminal Court] and its staff,” including ICC judges and Francesca Albanese, the UN’s Special Rapporteur on the Occupied Palestinian Territories. “These developments do not exist in isolation,” Isaac explained. “They contribute to a broader environment that undermines accountability and restricts the participation of those most affected by violations” which “reproduces structural injustice within the international system itself.”

The government representative from Haiti shared the perspective of pursuing gender equality amid “an insecurity crisis,” saying, “the Haitian government is doing the best that it can to facilitate this kind of justice that allows Haitian women to enjoy their rights, their civil and political rights, to enjoy the right to be a woman, to enjoy the right to be a girl,” but “it’s not easy.” She illustrated that Haiti has made “changes in the government and amendments in our penal code,” integrating additional types of violent interpersonal crime as well as corruption. She added, “criminal responsibility becomes a lot clearer [when there are] aggravating circumstances.”

In addition to military conflict, economic conflict can affect women’s lives. The government representative of Cuba, who described an ongoing initiative within the Cuban legal system to incorporate “the gender perspective” between 2020 and 2030 as well as a collaborative effort between “the Ministry of the Interior and the People’s Supreme Court” to “address cases that could be possibly related to discrimination in any of its manifestations.” However, the representative framed these efforts as persisting “despite the serious challenges imposed by the unprecedented economic blockade [...] implemented by the government of the United States, which impacts all areas of normal life.”

Ultimately, at the end of the youth meeting, Felipe Paullier surmised that “justice requires peace.” Noting 2025 as the “year with the biggest amount of conflicts since the Second World War,” he concluded that the UN’s Women, Peace, and Security agenda along with its Youth Peace and Security agenda are “central to how we build the pathways to justice,” for which he described peace as both a foundation and a prerequisite.

## **The sixth major theme was the need to institutionally incorporate and fund feminist and youth-led justice movements.**

The efficacy of feminist-led and youth-led organizations in improving access to justice cannot be overstated. According to Ananya Karachi, a youth representative from the African Development Association, “programs designed without consulting women helped only 48% of women resolve legal issues but when women were included [...] that number increased to 67%.”

In addition to Marwa Sharafeldin’s research that demonstrated how feminist activism is “the most important and consistent factor driving policy change” in the government meeting, youth delegate Ekaterine Muzashvili also provided tangible examples of feminist-led civil society organizations closing the “gap between law and practice.” One example consisted of an organization using its leverage to pressure institutional accountability for an orphanage that had been neglecting and abusing children.

Faizat Badmus-Busari also provided an example of the efficacy of feminist-led intervention in the conflict-related landscape within Sudan. Unjust or arbitrary detentions and executions of women were systematically undercut when these women were paired with lawyers, mediators, and paralegals from SIHA and other feminist-led networks, whose members “[document] violations, [support] survivors through legal processes, and [push] institutions to act.” Badmus-Busari cited agreement from civil society representatives in these networks from Sudan, Somalia, Ethiopia, and South Sudan that interventions require “not only legal frameworks but sustained support for actors.”

Examples abound throughout both meetings, including those provided by speakers from Cote d’Ivoire, Finland, Sweden, Kenya, Haiti, Morocco, Ukraine, Solomon Islands, and others, that explicitly affirmed the necessity and utility of civil society organizations and robust infrastructure that supports them.

Funding feminist-led networks and organizations includes funding those which are led by youth. Youth-led justice movements are often at the forefront of human rights advocacy, but they are persistently underserved in terms of protection and funding, as noted by Director Bahous.

Rania Hogga, youth panelist from Morocco, listed “chronic under-funding” as one of the major obstacles to youth-led justice movements. Even though, according to Hogga, youth-led movements are both impactful and innovative, they are rarely granted large portions of funds or “multi-year and flexible resources.” This leads to many young activists working “on a voluntary basis with limited access to institutional support, training, or sustainable funding.” Speaking at the youth meeting, the representative from Associação de Jovens Engajamundo echoed that “youth-led and feminist organizations require sustaining, flexible funding to continue providing community-based legal support, advocacy, and accountability.”

In closing remarks at the youth meeting, Felipe Paullier affirmed that “it is long overdue that the UN system, the member states, and partners as a whole match the ambition of young leaders around the world,” emphasizing that “commitments need to be backed by resources” because “sustained and flexible resourcing for youth-led organizations and for solutions [is] a key factor in how political commitments translate into solutions on the ground.”

Hogga proposed one way in which these “sustainable and flexible funding mechanisms,” which she described as urgent, can be dispersed: “donors and international organizations should increase direct funding and reduce barriers that prevent [access to resources.]” Similarly to Paullier, Hogga furthered, “long-term funding is essential to allow youth initiative to grow, innovate, and sustain their impact.” Paullier emphasized that the UN's Global Youth Investment Platform “should be the compass in how we center, [...] especially in the Global South.”

Beyond funding, speakers also contended that including feminist-led and youth-led organizations in governance, institutional design, and structural reform was necessary for social progress. Nauna Revo, panelist and youth delegate from Solomon Islands, explained that “strengthened partnerships between governments and civil society organizations” can lead to “transformative state spaces” that are less judgmental, more preventative, and more responsive, operating in a “timely, respectful, and consistent manner.” These improvements subsequently benefit “trust in institutions” throughout communities.

Another reason that youth involvement is essential, according to Revo, is that youth are “peer educators, advocates, researchers, and community mobilizers” who drive “digital awareness campaigns, peer education programs, performing arts, and community dialogues,” which “help women and girls better understand their rights, increase awareness of pathways to support, and encourage positive behavior change.” Moreover, formally including youth in “monitoring mechanisms, policy review processes, and data collection efforts,” enables “accountability [to become] more responsive and forward-looking.” Lastly, young people bring “urgency,” preventing what Revo calls the postponement of critical issues to “the next reporting cycle.”

### **The seventh major theme was to recognize, nurture, and expand the ways in which access to justice extends beyond the courtroom.**

Speakers across both meetings raised the need to promote both awareness of rights and personal buy-in to those rights, in formal and informal settings alike. Such settings include civic space, where enfranchisement is driven by civil society organizations. But it is also driven by interpersonal interactions, which affect access to justice on an individual basis.

The government representative from Serbia illuminated a disconnect between legal frameworks, which in Serbia, he said, enshrined gender equality in 1946, and social norms, which he defined as “prejudices, stereotypes and beliefs that place women in a less equal

position.” Although Serbia’s laws provide for gender-equal inheritance of familial assets, “the practices of renouncing inheritance in favor of male relatives is still present,” even though, he noted, women are severely disenfranchised by the consequences of doing so, which include cyclical economic dependence. Describing the results from a countrywide survey conducted by the Commissioner for Protection of Equality, he shared that of the women who did not exercise their right to inheritance, 68% did so on behalf of another heir and 44% on behalf of brothers.

In his remarks, the representative framed the right to inheritance as a “base for the economic empowerment of women,” “the right to access to justice,” and “an internal and intimate right to a voice within the close community, such as the family.” To highlight the disconnect between paper and practice, he quoted a participant from the government’s survey, who said, “everyone has the same right, only my right is a little stronger.” This attitude, the representative explained, “unequivocally points to the need to include men in this topic so that we can altogether influence the traditional reasons that have been the basis for discriminatory attitudes towards women” and to establish consensus on the nature of rights, whose decision to exercise them is “the sole decision of the right-holder.” Part of adjusting biased mentalities also involves urgently improving the “understanding of human rights concepts in general [...] in order to succeed in raising awareness of equality.”

Several government representatives and youth delegates offered useful and creative tactics for raising awareness of legal rights, what they mean, and how to access them. For example, the government representative of Burundi said that “radio programs are being disseminated on a weekly basis [by the Ministry of Justice] to raise awareness.” Speaking in the government meeting, a representative from Sonmaz Mashal, an NGO in Azerbaijan, emphasized the importance of “women [expressing] their realities through art and literature,” which can “strengthen confidence, foster dialogue and challenge the social norms that silence women and create safe spaces for healing, self-expression, and empowerment.”

Government representatives from Belize and Spain also targeted workplaces as important contexts within which women’s rights can be institutionally upheld. Ranjita de Silva de Alwis noted that “we need to include due diligence obligations by the private sector” in discourse about addressing “structural inequalities.” She furthered, “under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, Article 2.e., non-state actors must also employ due diligence to guarantee women’s equality.”

The youth delegate from Cote d’Ivoire evoked the need to incorporate support from “community leaders and mobile teams,” which can be especially useful in rural areas that are geographically isolated from centralized resources. Representatives and delegates also mentioned the role of internet access in democratizing knowledge of legal rights and, where applicable, participating in legal proceedings. Similarly, the youth delegate from Uganda called for “community-based legal awareness programs.”

According to Aferdita Prroni, a panelist in the government meeting representing Human Rights in Democracy Center (HRDC), an NGO in Albania, NGOs can often “reach out to vulnerable groups more effectively” than “state institutions because they work directly within communities, cooperate with local social services, and adopt survivor-centered approaches.” Thus, implementing “a good legislation and a good framework” can be strengthened in practice through cooperation between state institutions and NGOs that “frequently conduct information sessions, public awareness campaigns, and legal literacy programs.” She added that “another successful approach is periodic capacity-building of legal aid providers.” If state institutions can expand their infrastructure to collaborate with NGOs, “tailor-made services” can be combined with institutional legal aid. Teresa Zapeta, panelist in the government meeting, added that these programs should be in local languages.

Direct outreach can help overcome fears of stigma, feelings of isolation, and latent biases that rights are privileges rather than entitlements. In the youth meeting, Ananya Karachi discussed the African Development Association’s progress in “designing legal access programs for girls in rural communities” which “would educate girls on how to build networks of local legal advocates to support them in exercising their basic legal rights, such as obtaining identity documents and filing legal complaints.”

Ultimately, the youth delegate from Ireland summarized the importance of persistent awareness raising, saying “a girl who knows her rights is more likely to challenge discrimination, seek support when facing violence, and participate in decisions within her family, her community, and her society.”

An important precursor for access to justice in the legal setting is valuing gender equality in other settings. The youth delegate from Austria expressed that trust in the justice system is lost even in childhood, when girls’ and boys’ behaviors are held to different standards and “bad behavior from boys is more likely to be excused” while “girls at school are expected to sit still and pay attention.” She also predicted that “gender-sensitive training for teachers in schools can dismantle the reinforcement of stereotypes.” Moreover, she proposed that “information regarding rights and justice mechanisms should be available in accessible, multilingual formats and integrated into school curricula.” Similarly, Ananya Karachi encouraged “partnership between NGOs and local school systems,” so that “legal education can be integrated into schools beginning at the primary level.”

The youth delegate from Ireland affirmed that “justice begins long before a courtroom. It begins with education – not only formal education in classrooms, but human rights education that teaches girls what their rights are, how these rights protect them, and how they can claim them.” Part of enabling access to that education is mitigating factors such as “poverty, conflict, displacement, discrimination, and harmful social norms” that exclude women and girls from “spaces where this knowledge is typically shared.”

Because formal education spaces are often “the first casualty” when rights come under threat, according to the youth delegate from Ireland, “human rights education, particularly in

non-formal settings, becomes a powerful tool for justice.” These settings include “community workshops, youth groups, grassroots initiatives, and mentorship programs” as both introductory and explanatory vehicles for girls to “learn about their rights, leadership, and participation in public life.”

The ways in which gender inequality permeates can be subtle or overlooked. The youth delegate from Japan, noting her appearance as the first instance wherein the Japanese government financially supported a youth delegate to the conference, evoked “family and gender norms.” She explained these norms have “[hindered] women’s access to decision-making spaces,” stifled the “share of women in managerial positions [to] only 16.3%,” and cast women as responsible for “housework, which disrupts their careers.” The youth delegate diagnosed a root cause of this inequality as a failure of the marriage system, which “legally requires married couples to adopt a single surname. As a result, more than 94% of women change their surnames at marriage, often disrupting their professional networks and sense of identity.” A way to alleviate the weight of this inequality would be to “[allow] married couples the option of separate surnames.”

Sidra Riaz, a youth representative from the Sahkar Social Welfare Association in Pakistan, further affirmed that “justice does not begin in courtrooms,” instead ascribing two other onsets. She said “it begins in communities” and when “a young girl learns that her body, her voice, and her rights matter.” This knowledge “becomes real when safe, trusted systems connect survivors to institutions that receive them with dignity.” Echoing points about the need to fund feminist-led organizations and networks, she added, “this is not complicated, but it requires the world to decide that we women are worth the investment.”

**Even though tools for justice exist outside of formal legal settings, legal settings must fundamentally ensure gender equality under rule of law. Reforming legal systems was the eighth theme of the discussions.**

Speakers across both meetings discussed multi-layered initiatives and mechanisms that have already been implemented, are in development, or under consideration. The most highly recurring motifs were integrating technologies for greater efficiency and access and devoting specialized resources to gender equality. When applicable, representatives of governments and youth delegates also listed changes to laws and penal codes.

A persistent concern was the vulnerability of children due to power dynamics with adults and reduced legal autonomy as minors. To help address this, the government representative of South Africa described the passage of legislation that “affords children *locus standi* to act against their abusers.” (In legal contexts, *locus standi* is the right of initiating legal action or appearing before a court.) In the Philippines, the government representative described a recent decision by the country’s Supreme Court: “any person with knowledge” of acts such as violence, harassment, and discrimination “has personal standing or legal standing to file a complaint.”

The government representative of Kenya spoke about the development of “child protection centers, child protection units, child rescue centers, and gender-based violence recovery centers [...] across the country” as well as “child help-desks at police stations [and] more children’s courts.” She also discussed Kenya’s replacement of the Children’s Act of 2001 with the Children’s Act of 2022, ensuring alignment with Kenya’s constitution “defining the rights of intersex children and children with disabilities.” The government representatives of both Malawi and Mauritania mentioned campaigns and laws aimed at combating child marriage. Mauritania’s representative also mentioned efforts against female genital mutilation.

Several speakers discussed the need for specialized courts. The government representative of South Africa described the country’s “home-grown social offenses court [that provides] a catalogue of support services intending to create a caring, responsive, agile, and effective court experience.” The government representative of Spain listed the country’s “113 courts specialized in gender-based violence” and “42 specialized prosecutors” as tools for improving access to even an “advanced legal system.” The representative of South Africa also noted that legislation now enables “witnesses to testify virtually,” further expanding access.

In agreement with South Africa and Spain were Kenya and Morocco. Kenya’s judiciary, its government representative said, has established “specialized gender justice courts to improve efficiency and effectiveness [and] foster the efficient and expeditious disposal of cases. It is also meant to [...] improve case management in adjudicating sexual and gender-based violence cases.” The government representative of Morocco also emphasized the need for “establishing courts or specialized units that [focus] on violence against women.”

In the pretrial context, specialized units among law enforcement and clear access to law enforcement are essential. The government representative of Spain described “a special phone line, 016, which provides guidance for victims of gender-based violence” in 53 languages, 24 hours a day, and is also available on WhatsApp messaging. He added that Spain’s “national police [have] specialized units.” Similarly, the youth delegate from Morocco discussed “units of social workers that help women and provide them with emotional support” as well as “special offices for survivors.” The government representative of South Africa described “victim-friendly rooms at police stations to ensure privacy during statement taking from victims and survivors.” The government representative of Belize also echoed the need for a national domestic violence hotline.

Throughout judicial proceedings, agents of legal systems must be responsive to the factors surrounding gender-based violence. Speakers included gender-sensitive training and survivor-centric approaches among the means of building that responsiveness. Emphasized by the representative from SIHA, the representative from Interpol, Nauna Reva, panelist and youth delegate from Solomon Islands, and government representatives of the Philippines, Spain, Morocco, Haiti, and Belize, professional development for police officers, frontline responders, lawyers, judges, advocates, and other personnel through gender-sensitive training or other methods to promote gender sensitivity is crucial.

The government representative of the Philippines mentioned distributing “victim-sensitive guidelines for all types of criminal offenses” as one method of “continuous gender-sensitivity training for all our judges and court personnel.” The judiciary is also “set to launch the manual and protocol for handling women in conflict with the law, which incorporates both the Bangkok rules and the Mandela rules. It is a first in the region.”

Additionally, she shared that after the Philippines passed legislation such as the Magna Carta of Women, which adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the country’s “Supreme Court adopted the Strategic Plan for Innovations in 2022.” Under this framework, the judicial system “promulgated the guidelines for the use of gender-fair language in the judiciary and gender-fair courtroom etiquette.” It also studied “legal feminism in Philippine gender jurisprudence identifying stereotypes [in] decisions.”

Other ways to protect and empower women and girls within the legal system include increasing the costs of harming them and broadening the scope of harms that can be legally addressed. The government representative of Spain described “a law that establishes aggravating circumstances when [...] felonies happen within the context of a couple or a former partner.” Moreover, the Spanish penal code “recognizes the existence of three types of new violence such as digital violence, vicarious violence, and economic violence.” The youth delegate from Morocco stated that Morocco also criminalized economic violence. The government representative of the Philippines stated that the legal system increased “damages” for sexual violence offenses. Similarly, the government representative of Haiti expressed that Haiti’s modernized penal code “strengthened sanctions for violent crime such as kidnapping and sexual crime.”

“To curb the incidence of femicide” in South Africa, the government representative explained, “courts are now empowered to issue domestic violence safety monitoring [...] which calls for police monitoring of survivors.” Furthermore, “no court is permitted to grant bail [to a detainee] who has domestic relations with the survivor without first issuing a protection order against such perpetrator. This is meant to curb femicide cases that would occur after the perpetrator is released on bail.” Notably, police monitoring of survivors, including when accused assailants are released on bail, helps protect survivors from heightened danger while maintaining principles such as the presumption of innocence.

Government representatives from Spain and South Africa both raised points about consent, which the representative of the Nadam Foundation, who spoke at the government meeting, noted is not included in the legal definition of rape in 54% of countries. The government representative from South Africa stated that “consent in sex crime is always subject to consultation” because “consent to foreplay does not constitute consent to sexual penetration.” The government representative from Spain shared that Spain has “a law that recognizes affirmative consent as a defining element to determine whether there’s been a case of rape or sexual aggression.”

Recognized throughout both meetings as cross-context obstacles to justice, economic insecurity and economic dependency were also addressed as barriers to justice in the legal setting. The government representative from Spain described the option of “financing for a five-year period” for survivors of gender-based violence with “insufficient economic resources” as well as provisions that allow for the possibility of extended time off from work.

Government representatives from Kenya and Mexico evoked the need to broaden perspectives of what legal justice mechanisms can look like. The government representative from Kenya described the use of “alternative justice systems, such as the Alternative Dispute Resolution” in order to “[strengthen] community-based justice while promoting gender equality and fair processes.” The government representative from Mexico also emphasized the importance of “[thinking] in alternative measures and re-education, [including] greater focus on aggressors and a change in behavior.” These suggestions align with restorative justice treatment methods, which research has shown can be effective for breaking cyclical violence within some contexts while also centering survivors’ agency as well as healing for all victimized parties.

Further broadening the perspective on diversified legal mechanisms, Teresa Zapeta, panelist in the government meeting, explained that, for Indigenous women and girls, “justice is linked to the defense of our territories, collective rights, spirituality, reparation, [...] healing, and living well.” As a result, it is “important to create mechanisms of affirmative actions to ensure Indigenous women participate in decision-making and [the] administration of justice.” She cited a recent judicial appointment in Guatemala, which marked the first Indigenous woman in the country to be named as a judge.

Moreover, legal systems require structural integration with Indigenous justice systems in their jurisdictions. According to Zapeta, it is crucial “to recognize Indigenous justice frameworks in national systems and establish mutual coordination.” In addition to supporting a cohesive framework of justice, doing so can also help “reform practices that criminalize Indigenous leaders and human rights defenders.”

Speakers across both meetings emphasized access to affordable and free legal aid as imperative for women and girls to access justice. Several speakers explicitly noted the importance of legal aid, included legal aid in their work, or shared future goals for providing it. They included government representatives and youth delegates from the Philippines, Morocco, Kenya, Malawi, Belize, South Africa, Senegal, Chad, Solomon Islands, Samoa, and Uganda, and representatives from International Disability Alliance, SIHA, Associação de Jovens Engajamundo, HRDC (represented by Aferdita Prroni, panelist in the government meeting) and Union Sapari (represented by Ekaterine Muzashvili, panelist in the youth meeting.) Ranjita de Silva de Alwis also affirmed the need for legal aid. Others, such as the government representative of Burundi, implied legal aid through terms like “public services.”

Human trafficking and sexual exploitation, including through digital means, were also a point of discussion. Speaking at the government meeting, a representative of Interpol explained

that successful anti-trafficking operations in the last year “have revealed a worrying trend. Women and girls are increasingly targeted by traffickers online and on social media. This is part of a broader shift. Gender-based violence is expanding into the digital sphere. Women and girls now face digital forms of exploitation, from image-based sexual abuse to sextortion, increasingly facilitated by generative artificial intelligence.”

The government representative of the Philippines also emphasized the need to prevent online proliferation of Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation Material, describing the establishment of seven “specialty justice zones focusing on online sexual abuse and exploitation of children.” She added that one of these zones is Mindanao, “a recognized entry and transit point in human trafficking.”

One of Ranjita de Silva de Alwis’s calls to action was to address “tech-facilitated gender-based violence,” including “cyber crime, cyber trafficking, non-consensual sharing of intimate images, including deepfakes, cyber-grooming, and doxxing, where online and offline violence collide and coalesce.”

Actions taken can involve legal adjustments. For example, the government representative of Haiti noted how Haiti’s “modernized” penal code now includes cyber crime and human trafficking. The government representative of Spain also shared that “digital violence” is recognized by the Spanish legal code as a type of violence.

Actions can also involve “dedicated regulatory bodies,” as described by the youth delegate from Samoa, to address “tech-facilitated gender-based violence [as] a growing threat to the safety and participation of young women and girls online.”

The representative from Interpol also made some suggestions. She described Interpol’s Project Solitaria, in which “[Interpol] is training frontline officers to recognize and respond to sexual violence using survivor-centered approaches that prevent re-victimization.” She also discussed Interpol’s Project Echo, “which aims to develop a global law enforcement strategy against online image-based sexual abuse and digital sex crimes.” Finally, Interpol has “also integrated cyber capabilities into our anti-human trafficking operations using cutting-edge technologies to [identify] suspicious activity on websites and messaging apps.”

According to Aferdita Prroni, panelist in the government meeting, best practices in “traditional justice systems” combine “community legal empowerment, monitoring implementation [of legislation], monitoring of courts, amendment of [...] domestic violence law, discrimination law, and law on gender equality, [with] work that we do on international level.” The representative of Penal Reform International, who spoke at the government meeting, added that “the Bangkok rules provide clear guidance” and “states should reduce reliance on imprisonment for minor nonviolent offenses and expand women-centered community-based sanctions. Where detention is used, conditions must be safe, gender-responsive, and trauma-informed in line with international standards.”

**The ninth major theme was broadly expanding the inclusion of women living with disabilities and, where applicable, taking action to advance their legal autonomy.**

Speaking at the government meeting, a representative from International Disability Alliance stated: “Across the world, women and girls with disabilities continue to face barriers that prevent them from accessing justice.” She listed the following examples of these barriers: “the absence of procedural accommodation in legal proceedings, prejudice and stereotypes among judges and police, and a persistent lack of legal aid and support services.”

Prejudice and stereotypes arise from biases that regard women with disabilities as “incapable,” legally enforced by a “lack of recognition of legal capacity,” which she further elaborated results in a “[denial] of the right to make decisions about their own [lives].” Practically, this means that these women “cannot file complaints, cannot initiate legal proceedings, cannot testify freely, and cannot instruct lawyers on their own [behalfes].” Furthermore, she highlighted “guardianship regimes and substituted decision-making systems” as examples of the systematically-enforced exclusion of women with disabilities from accessing justice. These exclusions, she noted, violate Articles 12 and 13 of the UN’s Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

The need to expand or, in some cases, institute, structural inclusion of women with disabilities was echoed by speakers across both meetings. In the government meeting, Ranjita de Silva de Alwis called for making “the law disability-centered.” Teresa Zapeta asked, “when one considers the linguistic aspect of justice services, how are states behaving vis-a-vis [...] our brothers and sisters living with disabilities?”

Along with others, the government representatives of Morocco and Kenya, the representative from Catholic Women for the Right to Choose, and the youth delegates from Norway, Sweden, and Austria also explicitly evoked the need to expand disability inclusion.

The representative from International Disability Alliance outlined three concrete pathways to action and “[ensure] sustainable and scale-able justice systems.”

One is to “reform laws and policies that deny legal capacity, harmonizing their legislation with the [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities] and supporting decision making systems that enable women with disabilities to exercise their rights.”

The second action item is to ensure that “persons with disabilities [can] access legal aid and support services on an equal basis with others.”

The third step is to promote and support “partnerships with organizations of persons with disabilities” and incorporate “women with disabilities” as partners in “designing and monitoring these systems.” This is “essential to make justice systems truly accessible and effective,” as “policies created without us will continue to leave us behind” whereas “when justice systems become accessible and inclusive of women with disabilities, they become stronger for all.”

**The tenth major theme was improving employment options, employment outcomes, and access to recourse at work.**

Women face three main challenges, when it comes to labor.

*One challenge is a lack of job opportunities, even when women are normatively and legally allowed to seek work.*

Women can be prevented from breaking into the economy because of dwindling prospects or existing job scarcity. The youth delegate from Kenya raised a frank point: projections indicate that in the next 10 to 15 years, “over 1.6 billion young people from developing nations [...] will compete for only 400 million jobs.” For this reason, she said, “the biggest injustice facing the youth today is unemployment,” which is no longer solely an economic issue, “but an injustice” and “an economic crisis as well as a security crisis.”

The youth delegate continued that while Kenya’s 2019 Youth Development Policy “reaffirms that access to justice for all young women and girls is fundamental [for] human rights and critical for the attainment of the sustainable development goals, social cohesion, [and] inclusive economic growth,” the upcoming job shortage “points to the biggest crisis ever that the world is staring at.”

As a result, she contended, “governments [and] stakeholders, private sectors [and] civil society” must “start investing early [...] through deliberate and targeted programs which enhance [young people’s] skills [and] promote entrepreneurship to prepare them as a future workforce for enterprise and growth.”

Additionally, she illustrated an internal tactic by the government of Kenya to support this preparation: she described “the Financial Inclusion Fund, popularly known as the Hustler Fund,” which “has continued deepening financial inclusion for young people by giving them primary experience to credit, enabling them to build credit history that enhances” their access to banking.

The youth delegate of Burundi shared the concerns of her Kenyan counterpart, explaining that Burundi’s youth are facing “major challenges, especially unemployment and underemployment, preventing our potential from being fully harnessed.”

She also outlined policies and initiatives to “support the creation of jobs as well as income-generating activities throughout the country.” Some of these efforts are “translated into the Economic Empowerment Program and Youth Employment Program, as well as the Bank for Youth Investment.” These programs provide tangible support for “micro-enterprises and increase our financial autonomy.” She noted that Burundi also has a development plan aimed at “[improving] the skills of young people” between 2018 and 2027.

Other speakers described additional creative means for stimulating economies and improving women's and girls' access to justice in the process. Through "partnerships with local businesses," Ananya Karachi explained in the youth meeting, "youth currently involved in unpaid labor" can have "paid employment opportunities." Moreover, programs that offer "vocational and legal training" should also provide "youth participation and job training," as well as legal aid, in one integrated model. This can enable youth to build awareness of their rights in employment-related contexts, while also gaining skills to identify or create opportunities for employment. These programs, Karachi said, "are most effective when implemented through existing community-based initiatives, often closest to the real challenges women and girls face."

*Another barrier to women's economic participation is legal prohibition, normative discouragement, or both.*

When laws prohibit women from working, the first step is to address those laws. This, as the youth delegate from Saudi Arabia illustrated, has immediate tangible benefits. She shared that several laws have been "modernized," through legislation such as the Personal Status Law of 2022 and anti-harassment laws, as part of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030. This has enabled greater access by women and girls to social, economic, and political life, resulting in a more diversified workforce. One example of women's participatory outcomes is in the field of law, where the number of lawyers who are women has climbed into the thousands as women join firms, pursue leadership positions, and establish their own companies.

Among the results of gender-equal transformation, Ranjita de Silva de Alwis included "macroeconomic policies that promote stability" and help unlock "a nation's full human capital and potential." Conversely, she noted that laws and norms which restrict women's ability to work "impede women's access to global markets" and ultimately lead to "negative [impacts] on national and global economies."

Some laws directly restrict women's economic participation, such as "unequal retirement and protection laws," while others do so indirectly, such as "male head-of-household laws, property laws, credit laws, [and] banking laws," according to de Silva de Alwis. She added that laws linked to families, such as "unilateral divorce [and] virginity testing," and those that exclude matrilineal origin from nationality recognition also reinforce women's subordination and exclusion from public life.

One way through which norms rather than laws can suppress women's economic participation was described by the youth delegate from Japan. If division of labor within a home reflexively places women in positions of "[handling] housework," it can "[disrupt] their careers." Even leave for childcare can be unequal, she added, with "men [obtaining] little compared to women." These processes, which can be reinforced unwittingly, innocuously, or habitually, nevertheless diminish the extent to which men and women can thoughtfully and fairly determine how to best distribute labor within their home, to the expense of women's economic participation.

*The third challenge to women's access to justice in a labor-related context is mistreatment or exploitation in informal work settings, for which women cannot often easily or safely seek recourse.*

Sandy Joseph, a panelist in the youth meeting representing Diosa Haitiana, an NGO working with Haitian women in Chile, spoke of work environments characterized as “irregular.” Often involving migrant women in domestic work, care-taking work, and service work, Joseph explained these situations are associated with a lack of formal contracts, lower wages, and a dearth of social protections. Consequently, irregular workers can also “find themselves exposed to [...] trafficking in persons or [...] labor abuse.”

While some laws impose sanctions against those who hire workers in an irregular situation, these sanctions can be levied upon the workers as well, deterring workers from seeking legal recourse. In other words, “the risk of migratory sanctions” fosters a culture of disuse of the legal system to address work-related harms. Outside of the legal setting, workers also fear “reprisals” and “threats from their employers.”

Joseph explained that “dismantling this form of discrimination [requires] championing wholesale reform [...] on the legal, institutional, and social levels.”

One key reform is “decoupling the access to labor justice from migratory status,” guaranteeing that anyone can bring a case forward without institutional retaliation. Another reform is to create “units specialized in labor migration,” which are “intercultural and multilingual” and “operate within the institutions responsible for labor inspections.” Lastly, “structural reform [must include] the formalization of domestic work, access to Social Security, the existence of written contracts, and the guarantee of decent ways.”

These reforms, Joseph noted, reflect the international standards championed by the “International Labor Organization, particularly the effective implementation of Convention 189 on Decent Work for Domestic Workers,” which was ratified by Chile in 2016.

### **The eleventh key theme was an overall emphasis on intersectionality and multi-dimensionality, protecting the sanctity of people and Mother Earth alike.**

Perhaps better described as motifs than themes, human dignity and autonomy were recurrent concepts that underpinned the legal reforms, social reforms, and proposals that speakers across both meetings explained and encouraged. Dignity and autonomy underscored speakers' concerns about the use of emerging technologies, including AI, to perpetrate surveillance, censorship, and loss of privacy. They anchored the discussion about the calamities of conflict.

Dignity and autonomy were also at the core of initiatives described at the meetings, including multi-purpose clinics that provided aid in legal, social, and medical affairs; interventions to

promote women's independence and protect children; laws and policies that reflected the realities of impoverishment, violence, and discrimination; and mechanisms for sustainably surmounting geographical and other isolating barriers to accessing justice.

Many of the speakers delivered prose that validated growing contemporary urgency, conveyed deep love for humanity, or both, collected in the final section of this report. Despite operating within limitations, NGO representatives, youth delegates, government representatives, and panelists reported insights that expand the horizon of possibility.

The remarks of opening panelists in both meetings mentioned climate justice as an inseparable component of justice as a whole. In the government meeting, Teresa Zapeta explained that factors amplifying inequality include "exploitation as well as mega-projects [within Indigenous] territories." These factors also include "militarization, which worsens sexual violence, political violence, climate violence, and the criminalization of human rights defenders."

Speaking at the government meeting, the NGO representative from The Geledés Black Woman Institute described the "enduring impacts" of colonialism and the enslavement of persons with African origins in racialized societies. She described the disproportionate concentration of women of African descent in "the lowest levels" of income, employment, and social protection. Ultimately, gendered barriers are "compounded by structural inequalities produced by systemic racism and patriarchy," thus "[reproducing] conditions rooted in colonial legacies," particularly regarding the division of labor. She echoed calls for flexible, reliable, and long-term funding of civil society organizations, including those at the intersection of feminism and anti-racism. Teresa Zapeta and Wendy Isaac also spoke of the contemporary relevance of colonial legacies.

In the youth meeting, Nauna Revo identified the "vulnerability to climate-related disasters" as an essential target for "sustainable resourcing." In "the Blue Pacific Continent," she explained, "we believe in collective well-being, that the strength of the community depends on the protection of its most vulnerable members." The youth delegate from Samoa elaborated that "when we speak about justice in the Pacific, we cannot separate it from climate justice, as the impacts of climate change will profoundly impact the lives and futures of our future generations."

The youth delegate from Samoa went on to draw a juxtaposition. She said, "the Pacific is often described as small island states." In reality, "we are custodians of one vast ocean continent."

That vast ocean continent, she furthered, "contributes less than 1% of global greenhouse gas emissions." Yet the Blue Pacific communities "[face] the frontline impacts of rising sea levels, intensifying cyclones, and growing threats to food security, livelihood, and human security." In this context, financing that would empower Pacific Island countries' climate action "must therefore be understood not as aid or charity, but as climate justice."

## Special Afterward

*The meetings contained several instances of quotable prose, in which language matched the urgency of the moment and reflected the societal, spiritual, and natural fullness of human rights.*

Representative from International Disability Alliance, government meeting: “Justice that is inaccessible is justice denied.”

Representative from International Disability Alliance, government meeting: “Access to justice is not only about laws and institutions, it is about our power, our autonomy, our dignity as women with disabilities. Importantly, when justice systems become accessible and inclusive of women with disabilities, they become stronger for all.”

Tania Sourdin, panelist, government meeting: “Technology really does have the capacity to support women and children [...] to create greater access [...] but it really depends on the existing justice and legal system that operates, and it’s very much dependent on how courts and governments choose to invest in technology to ensure that barriers are removed as much as they can be, and also to ensure that what is produced doesn’t replicate systems that cause inequities to continue.”

Teresa Zapeta, panelist, government meeting: “Justice is a right that cannot be renounced [and a] pillar to reach the full enjoyment of all human rights.”

Teresa Zapeta, panelist, government meeting: “Recognizing the sociocultural diversity of women, we are not a monolith. There is a plurality among us.”

Teresa Zapeta, panelist, government meeting: “We cannot keep taking the future generations down a path that offers a model for life and model for governance based on violence without justice. That is my invitation to you.”

Ranjita de Silva de Alwis, panelist, government meeting: “Women cannot be sacrificed at the altar of culture. While the right to culture is a fundamental right, it cannot violate the right to gender equality.”

Marwa Sharafeldin, panelist, government meeting: “When working for real access to justice [...], it is almost impossible not to address religion, with its diversity of discourses, that range from patriarchal, to egalitarian, in its very locations of institutional power.”

Marwa Sharafeldin, panelist, government meeting: “It only makes sense that those with the deepest interests in change will have to be involved in the process for it to happen.”

Government representative, Haiti: “... to facilitate this kind of justice that allows Haitian women to enjoy their rights, their civil and political rights, to enjoy the right to be a woman, to enjoy the right to be a girl...”

Government representative, Serbia: “The exercise of any right, we must first understand that, ‘I have the right,’ means that whether or not that right is exercised is the sole decision of the right holder.”

Government representative, Mexico: “...we experience a multitude of challenges but it is clear that we are really betting on our legal systems and have so much work to do when it comes to the social sphere.”

Government representative, Spain: “... a transformative legal framework that begins with our love for the true and effective equality between men and women.”

Representative from Catholic Women for the Right to Choose, government meeting: “We firmly denounce the persistent interference of religious instances in the legal mechanisms of our region.”

Government representative, Ukraine: “Ensuring access to justice of women and girls is a fundamental condition for achieving gender equality and building fair and inclusive societies.”

Representative from Interpol, government meeting: “A single act of violence against women is an affront to human dignity. The ubiquity of violence today, with 1 in 3 women experiencing it in their lifetime, is a profound and collective crisis.”

Representative from Penal Reform International, government meeting: “We particularly welcome the clear recognition of the criminalization and detention of women, an issue that for the first time has been meaningfully reflected in the Commission’s outcomes.”

Representative from Penal Reform International, government meeting: “All women deprived of their liberty have the right to dignity, protection from violence, family contact, meaningful access to justice, rehabilitation, [and] healthcare including mental, sexual, and reproductive health services.”

Government representative, Malawi: “...access to justice is not merely about the existence of courts. It is about whether women and girls are able to claim the existence of their rights in practice without fear, [prohibition], and intimidation.”

Government representative, Senegal: “I firmly believe that sharing of experience among states under [the Commission on the Status of Women] will help to accelerate progress to

ensure that every woman, every girl, every child, has opportunities to flourish and meet their full potential without any fear and without any discrimination.”

Government representative, Chad: “Access to justice for women and girls is a key pillar for the advancement of rule of law and sustainable development...”

Sima Sami Bahous, Executive Director, UN Women, youth meeting: “Young feminists embody that hope. Your courage is already changing the world. Our task now is to match your courage with implementation and delivery.”

Sima Sami Bahous, Executive Director, UN Women, youth meeting: “Justice is not a service. Justice is a structural struggle. Justice is a redistribution of power.”

Sima Sami Bahous, Executive Director, UN Women, youth meeting: “Tech moves fast. We and you must move faster.”

Nauna Reva, panelist and youth delegate, Solomon Islands: “Young people are already contributing to solutions. We bring innovation, digital literacy, and community reach. We also bring urgency. The safety and dignity of women and girls cannot be postponed to the next reporting cycle.”

Nauna Reva, panelist and youth delegate, Solomon Islands: “In the Blue Pacific Continent, we believe in collective well-being, that the strength of the community depends on the protection of its most vulnerable members.”

Youth delegate, Norway: “It’s a troubling reality when rights that were once considered secure are being questioned, weakened, and rolled back.”

Youth delegate, Norway: “... equality benefits all genders. Men and boys also gain from a world where rigid expectations no longer limit who they can be, and where everyone has the freedom to realize their full potential.”

Youth delegate, Norway: “Equality that leaves people behind is not equality.”

Youth delegate, Denmark: “In the tale ‘The Emperor’s New Clothes’ [by Hans Christian Anderson] the Emperor is told that his new clothes are invisible to anyone who is foolish or unfit for their position. And this creates a very powerful psychological pressure. The Emperor himself cannot see the new clothes because they are not there. It is a trick and he is naked. But if he admits that, it would mean that he is foolish or unfit to be Emperor, so he pretends that he can see them. And the same thing happens with the ministers and the rest of the court. No one dares to speak the truth because they are afraid of what it would say about themselves. And that is how a lie can fill an entire room.”

Youth delegate, Denmark: “How many naked emperors have you encountered [...] speaking about women’s rights....? And secondly, because it cannot always be about these naked emperors: did you speak up?”

Youth delegate, Denmark: “....let us make sure that our rights will never be held hostage by the few.”

Representative from Associação de Jovens Engajamundo, youth meeting: “Access to justice for women, girls, and youth cannot be treated as a service. It is a matter of power, dignity, and structural transformation across our communities.”

Youth delegate, Sweden: “Young people’s participation must not be tokenistic, they must be partners in shaping justice systems, legal reforms, and social norms. Inter-generational dialogue and collaboration are key to ensuring the policies reflect the realities young women and girls face today.”

Youth delegate, Ireland: “A girl who knows her rights is more likely to challenge discrimination, seek support when facing violence, and participate in decisions within her family, her community, and her society.”

Youth delegate, Netherlands: “As long as I’m seen as a woman before I’m seen as a human being in the full breadth of my rights [...] the conversation is not over yet.”

Youth delegate, Germany: “Millions of women and girls experience broken promise. The rights they have on paper are not the justice they receive in practice.”

Youth delegate, Japan: “Gender is not a side issue. It’s the issue.”

Youth delegate, Japan: “All of us must re-sync our privileges and responsibilities, and prioritize transforming gendered power structures because all of us, people of all genders, form the power structures.”

Youth delegate, Kenya: “Matters of [the] youth agenda must now be treated as a substantive agenda on the high table.”

Anna, representative from Gay Global Action for Trans Equality, youth meeting: “The anti-gender movement attacking trans rights are the same ones restricting women’s bodily autonomy and [dismantling] feminism. When trans women are excluded from feminist spaces, we weaken the very coalition we would need to win.”

Dr. Felipe Paullier, discussant, youth meeting: “Expanding participation means addressing those who are structurally excluded. Geography, language, gender and sexual orientation, access to funding, and other forms of marginalization continue to determine who gets to



engage in rooms like this one, and it continues to determine who can speak about their lived realities.”

Dr. Felipe Paullier, discussant, youth meeting: “The role of institutions today is to build the pathways for young people, and especially for young women and girls, to have a say in designing the solutions.”

Nauna Reva, panelist and youth delegate, Solomon Islands: “Youth are essential partners.”