



Women with Disabilities Women's International Center Rural Exchange



Joint position calling for a pledge to empower women at the World Humanitarian Summit

The World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) aims at major global reforms to better protect and assist people affected by crisis. The undersigned organisations call on the WHS to put women's leadership, gender equality and gender-based violence (GBV) at the heart of these reforms.

Research and experience have demonstrated how the failure to address the gendered impacts of crises, including sexual and reproductive health and GBV, is one of the biggest weaknesses and recurrent gaps in disaster responses. Women, girls and local women's rights organisations are often amongst the first responders to crises and make important contributions to recovery efforts that too often go unacknowledged. More lives will be saved, and resilience efforts will be strengthened, if we put the agency of women and girls at the heart of the WHS outcomes.

This position draws on extensive input from women from crisis-affected communities and local women's rights organisations from contexts affected by natural disasters and conflict. It builds on recommendations generated at consultations with over 40 women at the UN Commission on the Status of Women (March 2015), a regional consultation with over 75 representatives of women's rights organisations in the Latin America region (April 2015), a workshop in the Hague on the 15th anniversary of UNSCR 1325 (May 2015) and an online consultation in July 2015 with many more civil society groups.

We call on governments, UN agencies, civil society, private sector and others to agree to a WHS pledge to empower women affected by crisis consisting of the following elements:

- 1. Empower women from crisis-affected populations to participate in humanitarian assistance, protection and recovery programmes, the formulation of humanitarian policy, as well as in 'accountability to affected populations' efforts.** Women play important roles in humanitarian response as well as post-crisis recovery. All stakeholders at the WHS should commit to strengthen and scale-up their support to this. This could include commitments to ensure inclusive and meaningful participation by women and girls in emergency assessments and

response design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, post disaster assessment and lesson learning (including on themes of disaster risk reduction, resilience, and emergency preparedness and response). To enable this, female staffing should be increased at all levels of humanitarian action from frontline staff to leadership level. Donors can use their influence to encourage women's participation from implementing partners and UN agencies, as well as greater investment in capacity building and specialised programmes such as 'safe spaces', in which women and girls are able to organise themselves, voice their views and contribute to decision-making. Explicit commitments should also be made to ensure women's participation in the context of the WHS focus on 'accountability to affected populations.' This should include strengthening analysis to ensure that women are not excluded due to age, ethnicity, caste, disability or other forms of discrimination. Multiple entry-points and strategies are required to ensure that Preventing Sexual Exploitation and Abuse mechanisms are effective. Disasters often impact on women's livelihoods in specific ways, as well as increase the number of female-headed households overall. The agency of women and girls can be supported through increased support to longer-term education and livelihoods opportunities, which could be factored into WHS outcomes on humanitarian financing and bridging the development and humanitarian divides.

- 2. Prioritize the engagement of local women's rights organisations in humanitarian action through reforms in humanitarian funding, partnerships, leadership and coordination.** Local women's rights organisations are often amongst the first responders, but their contributions remain inadequately recognised. Major reforms are required in structures like the GBV Area of Responsibility (AoR), the wider cluster coordination system, humanitarian country teams and country-level gender task forces to promote a more inclusive approach, including in humanitarian oversight mechanisms. WHS stakeholders should pledge to strengthen their partnerships with a diverse range of local women's rights organisations on both policy decision-making and practice, and to increase funding to support their work.
- 3. Strengthen government capacity to address gender equality and GBV in national disaster risk reduction (DRR), resilience, preparedness and response strategies and programmes.** The WHS has a major focus on empowering national actors in humanitarian action. To ensure that gender equality and GBV are factored into these efforts, three key elements need to be prioritised. Firstly, high level political commitments should as a priority translate into building greater state capacity for gender budgeting and gathering sex-disaggregated data (as well as other information on age, disability, caste and other country-specific factors which result in discrimination and barriers to assistance and protection). This should inform decision-making, monitoring and accountability in DRR, resilience and preparedness and response efforts. Secondly, national government capacity to deliver GBV prevention and response services should be built; informed by best practices and standards including the new Inter-Agency Standing Committee Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action (IASC GBV Guidelines). Thirdly, national plans on DRR, emergency preparedness and response should ensure meaningful participation by local women's rights organisations and women from crisis-affected communities at all stages (consultation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation). If requested by the women's rights organisations, this should be formalised in a signed memorandum of understanding between them and the authorities.
- 4. Put minimum standards on gender equality and GBV at the heart of WHS outcomes on humanitarian aid effectiveness and accountability.** The WHS should promote and strengthen three important initiatives in this regard: the new IASC GBV Guidelines provide minimum commitments for reducing risks of GBV through action across all sectors of humanitarian response. At the same time, the IASC 'Gender Marker' – a tool to encourage accountability for gender-related programming through humanitarian funding – is being reformed with a pilot to extend the monitoring of 'gender equality measures' across the full cycle of programming. In

addition, the Inter-Agency Working Group on Reproductive Health in Crisis Situations (IAWG) has released a global study assessing gaps in frontline service provision for reproductive health in emergencies. Recommendations from these initiatives should be integrated into WHS outcomes on humanitarian effectiveness and accountability. All WHS stakeholders should align their efforts in crises with minimum standards on gender equality, GBV and SRH in emergencies.

- 5. Use the 'Call to Action on protection from GBV in emergencies' Roadmap to 2020 and the 15th anniversary review of UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 to guide gender equality and GBV outcomes of the WHS; and include specific references to GBV in WHS outcomes on International Humanitarian Law.** Links should be fostered between the WHS, the Call to Action on Protection from GBV in Emergencies and UNSCR 1325. In particular, WHS outcomes and commitments should be guided by the forthcoming Call to Action Roadmap to 2020 and recommendations on the 'relief and recovery' pillar of UNSCR 1325 in its 15th anniversary review. Learning from processes like the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and National Action Plans on UNSCR 1325 should inform accountability mechanisms for promoting attention to gender equality and gender based violence in emergencies; such as through annual reporting on progress made by states and support to civil society 'shadow' monitoring reports. In addition, WHS outcomes on International Humanitarian Law and conflict should include specific reference to GBV; reaffirming and building on the commitments made by the Call to Action, the G7, UN Security Council, participants at the Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict in 2014, and regional initiatives like the African Union's efforts on gender mainstreaming and the International Conference of the Great Lakes Region (ICLGR) Kampala Declaration on Sexual and GBV of 2011.
- 6. Use the WHS process to affirm political support for principled humanitarian action and respect of international humanitarian law.** Government policies, linked to counter-terrorism agendas, which contravene international humanitarian law and deny women and girl's access to humanitarian assistance and protection should be reformed. Examples of these include the counter-terror policies that constrain the flow of remittances or the ability of humanitarian agencies to deliver assistance to women and girls in areas under the control of proscribed armed groups, and drone-bombing, renditions and other military operations that violate the human rights of women from conflict-affected communities.