

## **Statement: media play a crucial role in achieving gender equality**

21 February 2020



The crucial role of the media in achieving gender equality has been recognised more than 25 years ago. It's a strategic objective in the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the key global policy document on gender equality. Unfortunately, in the 25 years that the Beijing Declaration has been in force, there has been little to no progress on this strategic objective. In a joint statement, we and nine other international organisations, share our concerns with the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW).

## **Women in the media**

The strategic objective in the 1995 Beijing Declaration aims to: 'increase the participation and access of women to expression and decision making in and through the media and new technologies of communication' and to 'promote a balanced and non-stereo-typed portrayal of women in the media.' However the data shows that:

- women only make up 24% of the people seen in, heard and read about in newspapers, television and radio.
- 46% of news stories reinforce gender stereotypes while only 4% of stories clearly challenge gender stereotypes. Women are frequently portrayed in stereotypical and hyper-sexualised roles, which has long-term social consequences.
- 20% of the experts interviewed by the media are women.
- 73% of the management jobs are occupied by men compared to 27% occupied by women.

## **Agents of change for gender equality**

This current gender inequality needs to change! Together with The Carter Center, Fondation Hirondelle, Global Alliance on Media and Gender, International Media Support, International Women's Media Foundation, Media Diversity Institute, RNW Media, World Association for Christian Communication and WAN-IFRA we developed a statement in which we strongly

emphasise the role of the media as agents of change in achieving gender equality. We urge the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) to take action and make a priority of the role the media can and should play in achieving gender equality. We and the signatory partners are already actively promoting gender equality in and through the media. However coherent policies, rules, and mechanisms on all levels, starting with national media policies and media industry self-regulation are needed in order to achieve significant change.

## **Gender-sensitive content**

We strongly believe in the transformative role media can play in achieving gender equality in societies. By creating gender-sensitive and gender-transformative content and breaking gender stereotypes. By challenging traditional social and cultural norms and attitudes regarding gender perceptions both in content and in the media houses. By showing women in leadership roles and as experts on a diversity of topics on a daily basis, not as an exception.

## **Commission on the Status of Women**

Free Press Unlimited will attend and engage in the upcoming 64th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) taking place from 9 to 20 March 2020 in New York. The Commission on the Status of Women is the United Nations organ promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women. It convenes a yearly meeting in March for two weeks at UN Headquarters where representatives of UN Member States, civil society organisations and UN entities gather. The progress and gaps in the implementation of the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action will be discussed and reviewed this year.

Furthermore together with other organisations, Free Press Unlimited is organising a parallel event at the CSW64 on '*Counter-Stereotypical Narratives: A Gain for Stigma-Free and Inclusive Media*' which will be held on 13 March 2020, at 12.30 PM in the Blue Room.

Read the joint statement:

# **Joint Statement to the Commission on the Status of Women 64 on the crucial role of media in achieving gender equality**

submitted by

**Free Press Unlimited, The Carter Center, Fondation Hirondelle,  
Global Alliance on Media and Gender, International Media Support,  
International Women's Media Foundation, Media Diversity Institute, RNW Media,  
World Association for Christian Communication and WAN-IFRA**

**February 2020**

## **Our recommendations to the Commission on the Status of Women:**

- To recognize the crucial role of media in achieving gender equality in all domains by creating gender-sensitive and gender-transformative content and breaking gender stereotypes.
- Media should lead the way towards gender equality through gender-sensitive and gender-transformative content. For this we need coherent policies, rules, and mechanisms on all levels, starting with national media policies and media industry self-regulation.
- Safety of female media workers needs to be a key priority for Member States and the media industry. A culture of safety needs to be created and effective mechanisms for complaints and redress need to be put in place.

## **The role of media in achieving gender equality**

Media today, from traditional legacy media to online media, still hugely influence our perceptions and ideas about the role of girls and women in society. What we have unfortunately seen until now is that media tend to perpetuate gender inequality. Research shows that from a young age, children are influenced by the gendered stereotypes that media present to them<sup>1</sup>. Research has found that exposure to stereotypical gender portrayals and clear gender segregation correlates “(a) with preferences for ‘gender appropriate’ media content, toys, games and activities; (b) to traditional perceptions of gender roles, occupations and personality traits; as well as (c) to attitudes towards expectations and aspirations for future trajectories of life”<sup>2</sup>.

We are concerned that the latest Secretary General report<sup>3</sup> proposing priority areas to the Commission on the Status of Women does not mention the crucial role of media in achieving gender equality. This is a huge opportunity that is lost.

The data we have show that women only make up 24% of the persons heard, read about or seen in newspaper, television and radio news. Even worse: 46% of news stories reinforce gender stereotypes while only 4% of stories clearly challenge gender stereotypes.<sup>4</sup> One in five experts interviewed by media are women. Women are frequently portrayed in stereotypical and hyper-

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1 [Beyond the Stereotypes? Images of Boys and Girls, and their Consequences](#). Introduction, Dafna Lemish & Maya Götz. Nordicom, 2017.

2 Idem, page 12.

3 Report of the Secretary-General ‘Proposals on the Commission’s priority and review themes for 2021 and beyond’, UN doc E/CN.6/2020/4, 18 December 2019.

4 Global Media Monitoring Project 2015, 5th edition, World Association for Christian Communication.

sexualised roles in advertising and the film industry, which has long-term social consequences.<sup>5</sup> And 73% of the management jobs are occupied by men compared to 27% occupied by women.<sup>6</sup>

We strongly believe in the transformative role media can play in achieving gender equality in societies. By creating gender-sensitive and gender-transformative content and breaking gender stereotypes. By challenging traditional social and cultural norms and attitudes regarding gender perceptions both in content and in the media houses. By showing women in leadership roles and as experts on a diversity of topics on a daily basis, not as an exception.

In many countries around the world women's opinions are dismissed and they are not taught to ask questions and be part of public debate. Without information women don't know about and can't exert their rights to education, to property, pensions, etc. and they cannot challenge existing norms and stereotypes. This makes it impossible to achieve inclusive societies as we aim to achieve through the Global Development agenda. Access to information empowers women to claim their rights and make better decisions.

The media industry needs to be encouraged to produce gender-transformative content and to develop self-regulatory equality policies, including access to decision-making positions. Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms need to be set up to assess the progress within the sector. Thereby creating gender equality in content, workplace and management.

### **Violence against female media workers**

The safety of female media workers has in recent years developed into a serious concern, as it creates another obstacle to gender equality within the media. The majority of female media workers experience gender specific harassment both inside their organisations, outside of them, and more increasingly online.

Gender-based violence (GBV), both digital and physical, pose a threat to freedom of expression and access to information. Silencing female journalists constitutes an attack on democracy itself as it leads to self-censorship: women retreating from the public sphere because of the harassment. Almost a third of female journalists consider leaving the profession because of the threats, intimidation or attacks they endure. More than a third of female journalists avoided reporting certain stories for the same reason. Almost half of female journalists experience online abuse. Many of them indicate the abuse has led them to become less active or even inactive on social media, while it's a crucial part of the job.<sup>7</sup> Threats are often of a sexual and racist nature, targeted at the person instead of the content, making the workplace an unsafe environment for women.<sup>8</sup> This leaves the male-dominated field of media with even fewer female voices.

We believe that the media sector has the responsibility to provide a safe working environment for all staff and to develop policies that prevent GBV. It is imperative media organisations have mechanisms in place that ensure necessary support for those who have experienced GBV at the workplace, while performing their work outside and/or via digital means.

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5 'Beijing +25 –The 5th Review of the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in the EU Member States', European Institute for Gender Equality, 22 November 2019, page 111.

6 International Women's Media Foundation report, 2011, Global Report on the Status of Women in News Media.

7 Data derived from 'Attacks and Harassment The Impact on Female Journalists and Their Reporting', International Women's Media Foundation and Trollbusters, 2018. Similar findings in a global survey on online harassment of women journalists by the International Federation of Journalists in 2018 and a Dutch survey into the safety of female journalists in the Netherlands in 2019 "An Unsafe Climate".

8 'Beijing +25 –The 5th Review of the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in the EU Member States', European Institute for Gender Equality, 22 November 2019, page 111.