People's Assembly Declaration

New York, 24-25 September 2019

The world is on fire. We exist in a world of profound inequality, climate emergency, a crisis of human rights and closing civic space and where violence is increasingly protracted and normalised. We live in a world where there is a crisis of accountability and governance. In 2019, at the end of the UNGA Summit, we are saddened by the persisting lack of political will & leadership to even begin to address these issues. This is not good enough. This is failure.

We are over 300 delegates, representing 1000s of people's movements and organisations, and millions of people across the world.

We should not need a parallel People's Assembly to UNGA, the Climate Action Summit and the SDG Summit. The UNGA and Member States should serve their people, not work to strengthen themselves. We are coming together because our voices are not heard, we are denied access and meaningful participation, our recommendations are not integrated. In some regions, we do not even have the right to information, to a free media or to express ourselves.

We live in a world of defiant brave and principled people movements and communities. Civil society will no longer tolerate this ongoing political failure and Government's non-binding agreements prolonging business-as-usual instead of systematic transformation. While we extend the offer to work with Governments, we will call Governments out and hold them to account as we stand together for people and planet. We will not let our world burn and we will protect our children, the marginalised, and stand up for all right holders, including by protecting our right to civil space, democracy, and political participation. The voices and agency of the youth are critical to achieving these aims. Processes and political leadership need to be put at the service of people, and their resilience, now. As people read this, environmental and human rights defenders and activists are being killed, the Amazon, forests in Central Africa and Siberia - the world's lungs, are burning. Inequalities, poverty, discriminations and exclusions stubbornly persist with over 730 million still living in extreme poverty, 1.1 billion without access to electricity and 2.7 billion still without access to clean cooking facilities and more than 820 million still going hungry every day. A furthermore than 260 million people across the world suffer daily exclusion and discrimination based on supposed caste and ethnicity. A disproportionate number of them are women and girls who also suffer routine and normalised violence and femicide. Our global economic system is failing the majority of our populations, we demand fundamental structural and system change to serve the many, not the few and put people and the planet over corporations, greed and profit.

The world is in the midst of a climate crisis and we face the imminent danger of mass extinctions with unprecedented ecosystems and biodiversity loss. There are already irreversible and severe impacts on peoples' lives, and livelihoods, with those most severely affected having contributed negligibly and are already the most marginalized and impoverished, including women, Indigenous Peoples, communities of colour, young people, older people, persons with disabilities (PLWD), and people living with HIV.

Across the world right wing populists, nationalists and extremist groups are mobilising dominant populations to attack the most vulnerable. Democratic values are under strain from unaccountable strong men attacking civil society and the media in unprecedented - and often brutal ways. To improve the state of national democracy, as civil society we need to develop and advocate for new standards for electoral management, institutions that are free from political

control and subject to democracy accountability, and new standards to keep election periods free from misinformation and illicit interference.

Our priorities: The People's Assembly identified our world's most urgent challenges - we demand that the leaders of the world take action on these global priorities which affect every living creature on the planet.

PEACE AND CONFLICT

Today, 40 countries are in active conflict. 92 countries have become less peaceful over the past decade.[1] Violence causes 1.6 million deaths worldwide every year.[2] These issues related to SDG16 underpin the entire 2030 Agenda. Progress on SDG16 has been slow and in many cases has reversed. Achieving progress on the whole SDG agenda requires societies that are peaceful and free of conflict, and with transparent and accountable institutions and functioning justice systems.

The meeting reaffirms support and endorsement for the *Rome Civil Society Declaration on SDG16+* which calls for accelerated action. To do this, there needs to be more diverse stakeholders engaged and consulted in peace, justice and governance processes at all levels – including those most marginalized, including women and girls, youth, minorities, persons with disabilities, LGBTQI, those living with HIV and those discriminated on the basis of work and descent. Civil society needs to be united to fight back against the rising tide of nationalism and autocratic trends, structural inequalities and marginalisation that increase the risks of violence and conflict.

Our Demands:

We call on the international community, including states, multilateral actors and civil society to:

- Adopt the recommendations of the Rome Declaration
- Meaningfully and substantially enact the women, peace and security agenda (WPS, 1325) by ensuring that women and civil society groups are included in all levels and tracks of peacebuilding and peace processes.
- Address the root causes of conflict and violence - including structural inequality, nationalism and autocratic governance - through meaningful investment and engagement with those most at risk.
- Improve all instruments and spaces of dialogue to heal wounds and to prevent conflicts, promoting a culture inspired by transitional and restorative justice.

CLIMATE AND ENVIRONMENT

We are in the midst of a climate emergency. We face imminent danger of mass extinctions of our ecosystems, biodiversity loss and even more human suffering. If we carry on as we are, we will not reach the commitments set out by governments in the Paris Agreement. We will not keep global warming under 1.5 degrees Celsius. This will push 100 million people into poverty, undoing the work of the SDGs. Those on the frontlines of this climate emergency have contributed the least to it and are often already the most marginalized and impoverished communities. They face extreme and unpredictable weather which destroys their livelihoods, habitats and traditions. They include women, young people, Indigenous Peoples, minorities, those facing

discrimination based on work or descent, older people, persons with disabilities and people living with HIV.

While we all must mitigate and adapt, the main responsibility lies on those who got us here in the first place. Developed countries have been negligent and they are the most responsible for driving the shift we urgently need. They have the financial and technical capacity to take the lead and support developing countries to transition to resilient, low carbon economies. Incremental adjustments and false technological solutions are not enough. We need seismic shifts in the current fossil-fuel driven political, economic and financial system. We need more investment in adaptation and resilience. We must work to reclaim our food systems from the grip of the powerful corporate agribusinesses that have concentrated land and wealth in fewer and fewer hands, driven climate change, deforestation, and soil loss.

Climate and environment concerns need to be meaningfully mainstreamed across all sectors - public and private - so that human activity on earth is collectively working towards the Paris Agreement. Human rights must be at the core of our work on climate change. It must recognise that different people face unique vulnerabilities in the face of climate change and have unique voices and solutions to share. It must also recognise the unique threats faced by environmental defenders, including women. It must acknowledge the tireless work of those on the frontlines of the climate emergency in protecting the environment. There can be no climate justice without gender justice, without safeguarding the rights of Indigenous Peoples, and without just transition that builds resilience and leaves no one behind. We must pursue approaches like agroecology that work with nature instead of against it, and put power and knowledge back in the hands of farmers.

Our Demands:

We call for all Governments to:

- Put more and better human and financial resources behind inclusive, gender-responsive planning processes such as the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) and Disaster risk reduction (DRR) and resilience plans.
- Ensure that women and marginalised groups are made central to the decision-making and implementation processes of the NDCs, NAPs, DRR and resilience plans including leadership of the agenda. This includes in the leadership of the agenda.
- We call on the biggest historical emitters from developed countries, to increase their mandated financial support, including by more than doubling their previous commitments in the Green Climate Fund (GCF), and to accelerate technology transfer and resilience building in order to support gender-responsive, human-rights centered inclusive mitigation and adaptation actions by developing countries. This includes making international climate finance directly accessible to civil society organisations and those who are on the frontlines of the climate emergency.

We call on the international community (including the United Nations) to:

- Make the Paris Agreement legally binding, and to develop an enforcement mechanism for countries that break their commitments.

INEQUALITY

Economic Structures

The current economic policies and financial markets have resulted in states incapacity to respect, protect and fulfil rights, safeguard against corporate abuse, ensure just and gender-just trade, redistribute wealth and power, ensure people are resilient to and from shocks, and to deliver the 2030 agenda. The effective and democratic delivery of the SGDs hinge upon universal publicly owned and delivered social protection, including public services, ending risk and harm in the world of work and ensuring access to decent work, redistributing women's unpaid care and domestic work, and action and finance for climate justice. Trade and production systems, as well as science and technology innovation, have to be coherent with sustainable human dignity.

Our demands:

We call on governments and civil society to:

- Ensure that international trade and investment alleviate poverty and safeguards women's livelihoods, land rights, food sovereignty and the natural environment.
- Develop progressive taxation policies and procedures to ensure that the right level of funding is available for gender responsive public services and strengthen international coordinated instruments to prevent international tax evasion and avoidance and illicit flows through tax havens.
- Provide appropriate financial market regulations to avoid perverse effects of derivatives markets and speculations on commodity prices, affecting economic conditions of millions of small-scale farmers and food access for vulnerable people.
- Reassert the need for multilateral reforms to democratise global economic governance such as a global debt workout mechanism, UN intergovernmental tax commission and a global technology assessment mechanism.
- Define a global framework to protect privacy, personal data and right to information in the digital world, making digital companies accountable and liable for violation and protecting women, youth, the rights of workers and farmers, in digitalization of manufacturing, agriculture and services.
- Promote a participatory, inclusive and transparent global and regional mechanism for evaluation of digital technologies before they are developed and deployed.

DECENT WORK AND DESCENT - LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND

Decent work is fundamental to human development and dignity. The world's poorest and most marginalised remain unable to access decent work. There are numerous reasons for this: extreme poverty, gender, and those who are excluded because of their standing in the social hierarchical systems existing in countries. These constitute population groups (e.g. Roma from Europe, Burakumin from Japan, Quilumbolas from Brazil, Somali Bantu from Somalia, Haratine from Sahel region and Dalits from South Asia) that are historically excluded on social, economic and political spheres and relegated to the bottom of their societies. They are prohibited from significant social engagement, obligated into bonded labour or slavery, and not involved in decision-making. They face serious forms of physical, economic and psychological violence,

and multiple other human rights violations, with women and girls bearing the worst forms of violence. The intersectionality of women, children, youth, older people, LGBTQI and persons with disabilities and those living with HIV, among others, face multiple forms of discrimination and violence, which makes them vulnerable among most vulnerable communities.

Communities that are discriminated on the basis of work and descent (DWD) consist of more than 300 million people across the world and would make up the 7th largest country if counted together. The people affected by DWD are historically and intergenerationally excluded because of their socio-political standing in the social hierarchical systems existing in countries. These systems hinder the socioeconomic and political development of communities through systems of exclusions which have been cemented through history. There are also intersectional discriminations: where women, children, youth, persons with disabilities, among others, face overlapping forms of discrimination and violence, which makes them even more vulnerable among the most vulnerable communities. However, these particularly marginalised people are rarely considered in development work.

Our Demands:

We call on governments to:

- Ratify and implement the binding the ILO conventions on Decent Work and Ending gender-based violence in the workplace
- Ensure legislation and policies that uphold the need for decent work as a fundamental right including through targeted implementation of laws, interventions and budgets
- Ensure the SDGs and other international processes recognise DWD as a form of discrimination
- Ensure policies on and protection mechanisms for DWD Communities
- Provide disaggregated data on progress made in not only identifying DWD communities but also in terms of access to services, budgetary allocations, etc.
- Implement effective and targeted interventions on education, employment, political participation, access to justice, access to services and budgets.
- Ensure those who are left behind are to be able to participate in political and civic space

We call on civil society to:

- Recognise these communities and evolve specific strategies and agency of these communities.

GENDER

Gender equality is critical to all development objectives set out in the SDGs. Women, girls and LGBTQI people of all ages continue to be marginalised in all societies, through patriarchal structures and institutions which exclude them from decision-making, impede their access to basic human rights, restrict their mobilities and put them at risk of gender-based violence. We continue to live in a world where 1 in 3 women will experience violence at during their lifetime. LGBTQI groups are also particularly exposed to violence. There are 500 million older women, globally, whose needs and agency are often made invisible. Climate change, conflict, disasters and other human rights violations often hit women and girls the first and the hardest. Yet they

are most often excluded from the decision-making on how to respond. It is time to fulfil women's and girls' rights as set out in SDG 5. There has been insufficient progress on most of the structural barriers addressed in SDG 5, including discrimination by state systems that are supposed to uphold their rights, as well as gendered social norms and traditions which affect their participation and quality of life. Women and LGBTQI people continue to be under-represented at all levels of political leadership. Despite quotas for representation of women at the political level, it is often the most privileged women who reach these positions. The average woman in a society, let alone those most marginalised, are typically excluded from these opportunities, because of social and structural discrimination which prevents them. Women's work is often unrecognised, unpaid, and even when paid, women are systematically paid less than men, especially women of colour and from other marginalised groups. Women are much more present in precarious work, where their labour rights are not protected and where they are even more exposed to gender-based violence. Gender equality work must understand the unique barriers that women and LGBTQI groups, by using an intersectional lens of analysis. This includes considering the overlapping barriers faced by those who are also experiencing racism, ageism, classism, ableism, homophobia, heteronormativity, poverty and other forms of discrimination and oppression.

Our Demands:

We call on governments and the international community, including civil society, multilaterals:

- To take greater steps to monitor progress on all the SDGs, especially SDG 5, using gender- and identity - disaggregated data
- To demonstrate more political will and investment, into reforming institutional and social structures that marginalise women and girls from their basic human rights - including but not limited to - their access to justice, to decent work and education
- To address violence against women and girls head on, by addressing patriarchy at all levels of society and ensuring access to protection and to justice
- To develop better, more inclusive mechanisms to ensure that women can access positions of leadership in politics, in development and in peacebuilding.
- To ensure the implementation of the recommendations of CEDAW and CSW

PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Persons with disabilities are particularly vulnerable to poverty, inequality and violence. One in five of the world's poor are living with disabilities. In addition, people with disabilities are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, such as slow and rapid onset disasters, food insecurity and infrastructural collapse. Women and girls with disabilities are particularly vulnerable to a range of violence, including gender-based violence and sexual violence in both peace time and in conflict. Persons with disabilities are largely excluded from political, development and peacebuilding processes, and even when they are included, the voices and needs of women and girls with disabilities are often invisible. For the SDGs to be achievable and effective, all debate and action must explicitly and meaningfully ensure the inclusion of persons with disabilities. Further, the international resolutions in place to support the rights of persons with disabilities are not being upheld.

Our Demands:

We call on governments and the international community, including civil society and multilaterals:

- to ensure that all measurement, indicators, targets and reports should take steps to address persons with disabilities, including its overlaps with other markers of identity, including gender and age.
- to ensure that data on climate change and environment it interrogated with the lens of disability.
- to ensure that humanitarian assistance and development programmes should centre the needs of persons with disabilities.
- To uphold the commitments set out in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), including the optional protocol and general comment 3 on women and girls with disabilities.

CIVIC SPACE

Civil society is under serious attack in 111 countries. Across the world, repression of peaceful civic activism continues unabated resulting in just 4% of the world's population living in countries with open space for civil society.

The deterioration in civic space is mostly acutely reflected in systematic censorship, widespread violations of the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and the harassment, intimidation and detention of civil society activists.

Those constituencies most directly and frequently subjected to this repression include journalists, women's rights activists and indigenous leaders. Environmental activism is the most deadly and dangerous form of activism globally. Environmental defenders, including indigenous leaders, water defenders and climate activists, are more than three times as likely to be killed as those defenders working in other sectors. At least 164 environmental human rights defenders were killed in 2018. Data compiled by the Business & Human Rights Resource Centre indicates that attacks on defenders working on business and human rights has also increased over the past two years.

Civic space is our space, it is not for States to give or take. The repression of civic space is one of the most profound indicators of a State's intentions and its ability to deliver on its SDG commitments. We will no longer accept these violations of our rights.

As the international community faces the daunting reality that it is not on track to achieve the goals set out in Agenda 2030 nor the levels of ambition demanded by the science to keep global warming below 1.5^{0}, the UN must double its efforts to protect and promote civic space. It is becoming increasingly clear that without greater civil society engagement in UN processes and at the national level with member states, the locally grounded solutions that are imperative to the radical transformation needed to achieve the SDGs and reverse climate change will remain dangerously elusive. To turn the current tide towards the world we want and the world that leaders have committed to, civil society must be respected and protected.

We reiterate the Belgrade Call to Action which urges United Nations member states to take proactive measures to reverse the closing of space for civil society, to end the attacks on human

rights defenders and to expand democratic participation, including in Agenda 2030. We further endorse the declaration of The Peoples' Summit on Climate, Rights and Human Survival held in New York in September 2019 which underscores the right to be fully informed and empowered to meaningfully participate in all climate decision-making processes.

Our demands:

- States explicitly and publicly recognise the intrinsic value of civil society and the connection between a vibrant civil society, including social movements, and a country's social, political and economic development.
- The international community publicly acknowledges that current approaches to monitor, document and holds states to account for violations of civic space are insufficient and should be subject to a robust audit.
- Existing structures are reinvigorated and others are formed to ensure that citizens of the world have a greater voice in global affairs, including a United Nations Parliamentary Assembly and a UN World Citizens Initiative.
- The Agenda 2030 should be given the level of recognition that reflects its significant responsibilities in terms of delivering human rights, SDGs and managing destabilization by lifting it to a higher institutional level in the UN. The work to end inequalities and ensure sustainable development requires a much greater priority in the UN than the 8-day HLPF during the ECOSOC in July, which it has now.

FINAL STATEMENT

People all over the world, in every country, every day, suffer from the overlapping impacts of inequality, poverty, violence, discrimination, militarisation, environmental degradation and a shrinking of their rights. We no longer accept this as our norm. Climate change threatens our existence, and the children and young people of the world are calling on us to stand with them. We, the people's movements, communities and civil society commit to do so. We will not reach our global commitments without addressing climate change.

The economic, financial and political systems are concentrating power and wealth in the hands of a few, favouring a limited number of individuals, countries and businesses. Nature is our life support system – when it is degraded, polluted and overused there are disastrous impacts for our food security, water supply, air quality and for our economy.

We call on the Governments across the world to meet our demands with urgency and political determination. We call on Governments to meet and deliver on the global commitments made in 2015 in relation to the Paris Agreement, Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, WPS Agenda (1325) and deliver on the 2030 Agenda. It is imperative that Governments address the interconnectedness of these agreements including agreements on financing.

We commit to working with our Governments to meet these demands, we commit to holding our governments to account against these demands, and we commit to calling out the differences between public commitments and domestic realities.

Our world is on fire, we commit to doing everything we can to put that fire out, so we can live in peace, dignity and within planetary boundaries.