

Originator: Gender Justice Communities of Practice

Endorsed by: ACT Europe Forum, ACT India Forum

ACT Alliance public statement on gender justice

All human beings are created in God's image to live in equal relations, so that all may flourish and live in peace with one another. This is the theological foundation that shapes our commitment to work for the rights and dignity for every person.

We affirm our Gender Justice Policy. Gender inequality is a manifestation of a system of power, privilege and oppression. There is an imbalance as to how this system affects people. Women and girls experience shockingly high levels of discrimination and exclusion, which perpetuates poverty and deprives them of their fundamental rights.

Gender stereotypes of roles, rights and responsibilities contribute to increasing sexual and gender based violence, within domestic contexts, in the workplace, political spheres as well as in situations of war and conflict. As a result, women's voices and agency are marginalized. Global symptoms include sexual violence in conflict, women forced into vulnerable situations of trafficking and often become victims of harmful practices and femicide.

We live in times of shrinking civil society space and growing fundamentalism that continue to maintain and uphold 'traditional' gender norms. The worrying trend of shrinking civil society space and backlash towards women's human rights defenders also has a significant impact on women of faith who dare to speak out in defence of women's rights and gender justice. They are often ostracized, discriminated against and suffer violence from society as well as within their church or faith community.

The lack of access to economic resources, like land and property, the unequal access to education and employment and the under-representation of women in decision making processes are other consequences of a patriarchal system that is built on exclusion and inequality. Economic empowerment has an impact in all areas of women's lives and in the sustainable development of their families and communities.

Faith communities are active partners in addressing these inequalities by promoting change in cultural mindsets and beliefs. Therefore, it is imperative that the voices of women, men and young people who dare to speak up for gender justice, inclusion and for the rights of marginalised groups are heard and amplified in faith communities.

To address and overcome this systemic and structural discrimination and exclusion, it is necessary to take gender as a primary focus, and to analyse how gender intersects with other identity markers.

Transforming unequal gender power relations, and the structures, norms and values that underpin them is a precondition for achieving the multidimensional change needed to "leave no one behind", one of the principles of the 2030 Agenda. Women who exercise their agency and citizenship and strive for gender

equality, together with men who are engaged in transforming harmful masculinities, are the forces we must support to drive and sustain transformational change that upholds dignity and justice for all.

Religious leaders and actors play a key role in shaping people's moral and ethical values or norms of acceptable behaviour. In many countries, religious authorities have direct or indirect influence over legislation, both religious and secular. This includes family law which regulates aspects of family life that are absolutely crucial for the fulfilment of women's rights, such as the juridical status of women, legal age of marriage, the right to freely enter into marriage, domestic violence, divorce, custody of children and inheritance laws. It is therefore imperative that faith leaders speak out against discriminatory social norms and practices and legislation that condone gender injustice and stand up for a gender just world that ensures that all people have the power to shape societies, faith communities and their own lives.

We call on all members of the ACT Alliance, civil society actors, governments and multilateral stakeholders to:

- Protect and support women human rights defenders in their work to speak out in defence of women's rights and gender justice, by publicly denouncing discrimination, harassment, ostracization and violence against them, offering them pastoral support, and giving them a space to voice their message.
- Work to transform unequal gender power relations, and the structures, norms and values that underpin them, to achieve equal representation and full participation in programs, structures and decision-making, achieving the 2030 Agenda.
- Recognize faith as holding important ethical values that promote abundant life and dignity of all human beings; working together with faith leaders, communities and actors to address sexual and gender based violence, protecting those in vulnerable situations, in their families or in war and conflict situation, and transforming harmful practices, cultural norms and stereotypes that are restricting gender equality.
- Work on comprehensive information and ensure access to sexual and reproductive health care and provide education on rights, so that women and girls can take informed and responsible decisions related to their sexuality and bodily integrity.
- Engage in a continuous dialogue, based on love, trust and transparency, within ACT Alliance, with partner organizations and churches to strive towards a change in societal norms, harmful attitudes about gender roles, including masculinities, reproductive choices, human sexuality, child marriage, and stigmatization of HIV and AIDS, among other issues, for mutual learning and a better realization of gender justice and sexual and reproductive health rights.
- To address the systemic causes of poverty and lack of access to resources promoting economic rights of women and girls, such as the right to decent work, to own land and properties, and inheritance.
- To implement the ACT Gender Justice Policy and thus work towards making our own organizations or institutions responsive to notions of gender sensitivity, inclusiveness, equality and create an enabling environment for all.