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Together for Justice: Our Collective Action on Gender Justice, Human Rights, Dignity, and Freedom for All

COVER NOTE

The ACT structure responsible for the statement is the ACT Alliance Global Gender Justice Reference Group, in collaboration with the International and Regional Gender Justice Communities of Practice. The key issues covered by the statement are Gender Justice, Faith and Human Rights, Gender Justice Transformative Policies and Action.

TOPIC

The statement emphasizes the influential role of faith leaders and churches in collective struggles for gender justice. The statement advocates how people of faith are and can be powerful changemakers in transforming patriarchal attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours to advance gender justice. Engaging men and boys in our work together for gender justice is critical. The statement includes the priorities of the Global Gender Justice Programme, for example, Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), Gender-Based Violence (GBV), Economic Justice and Transformative Masculinities. The statement also recognises the increasing backlashes on gender equality and calls for strong action from the ACT Alliance membership and beyond.

STATEMENT

Together for Justice: Our Collective Action on Gender Justice, Human Rights, Dignity, and Freedom for All

We, ACT Alliance, are the world's largest ecumenical coalition engaged in humanitarian, development, and advocacy work. Our more than 150 members in over 125 countries work in a coordinated and effective way for rights-based and sustainable development. We are called to work 'together for justice,' which includes ensuring gender justice, in our local communities, countries, regions and globally. Human dignity is a foundation of human rights. Religious values are, at their core, about dignity, justice, compassion, and love, and we commit to act out of those values, both within and beyond the ACT Alliance. We recognise our uniquely influential role as faith leaders and churches in collective struggles for gender justice.

We can be powerful changemakers in transforming patriarchal attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours towards advancing gender justice. Religious and cultural practices are influenced, developed, and motivated by our social, economic, and political contexts. We recognise the importance of revisiting scriptures to affirm our values of love, dignity, and justice, while also investing in inter-faith and feminist dialogues.

The impacts of rising conflicts, the climate emergency and forced migration are disproportionately felt by women and girls, who are often on the frontline, such as in Gaza, Sudan, Myanmar, the Pacific Islands, Brazil, and Ethiopia. Conflicts and climate emergencies lead to disproportionate and differentiated impacts on women and girls in all their diversity. For instance, sexual and gender-based violence is often used as a weapon of war. Women's bodies become battlefields, perceived to be sites of contestation, to be dominated and conquered, through physical acts of violence, or repressive policies restricting bodily agency and access to sexual and reproductive health and rights.

In times of increasing polarisation, it is important to reaffirm that there is no contradiction between our faith and human rights. We, as faith actors are diverse, and our realities and experiences differ, depending on our contexts and lived realities. We are committed to 'walk the talk', strive for achieving gender justice, and recognise the diversity of paths that we are each walking. Since the General Assembly in 2018, we have witnessed progress in our organisations, communities, and countries. For example, we have, to varying degrees and depth, worked to each have gender justice policies that are contextualised, and provide strong roadmaps for implementation. We align with the ACT General Assembly theme and recognise the importance of our own organisations and networks reflecting our commitment to gender justice. This includes increased numbers of women in leadership and decision-making spaces in the ACT Alliance membership and secretariat. The diversity of women in leadership is vital for effective governance. Too often, leadership spaces are dominated by white males and those embodying patriarchal leadership. Together we can transform unjust organisational structures, and affirm gender transformative leadership practices, including having more women in leadership positions.

As an alliance, we celebrate the progress made towards achieving gender justice through the locally led efforts of ACT Forums and Communities of Practice, who have worked together to mobilize interconnected movements for this cause. ACT members are not shying away from engaging in dialogue on issues perceived as 'taboo.' For example, the commitment by members to discuss LGBTQI+ rights at the virtual assembly in 2021 and affirm that our theologies and practices 'do no harm'. Due to our collective advocacy in national and global policy spaces, the critical role that faith-based partnerships,

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across faith actors and beyond, contribute to advancing gender justice is increasingly recognised by governments, UN agencies, and feminist secular civil society. We have also intentionally worked to engage men and boys in our struggles for gender justice and challenge the misconception that only women are responsible for pushing for gender transformative change.

Despite progress being made, in many contexts there is an erosion of women's rights and backlashes on gender equality. As people of faith, we recognize that the backlashes are not remote or distant, they can sometimes be experienced from within our community and have grave personal costs. Women human rights defenders, including people of faith, are attacked and intentionally silenced, for speaking out for gender justice.

Commitments & Recommendations

We as ACT Alliance commit to:

- Transform harmful **gender norms and stereotypes**, including **toxic masculinities and femininities**, which uphold patriarchal structures and societal expectations, impose detrimental standards on girls, women, and gender non-conforming people, thus perpetuating violence, and inequality against them.
- Encourage **men and boys to embrace empathy, respect, and equality**, and to becoming allies in the fight for gender justice.
- **Adopt and implement gender justice policies.**
- Support actions that combat human trafficking and sexual exploitation to which migrant women are mostly exposed.
- Invest in and affirm **gender transformative approaches and women in leadership**, who are often on the forefront, whether in times of crisis, conflict, or climate emergency.
- Review the ACT statutes and by laws to ensure gender balance of ACT Assembly voting delegates.
- Work collectively to **decolonise our methodologies** and invest in locally led contextual action to address human rights violations.
- Promote comprehensive sexuality education that guarantees **autonomy and freedom for women**, and a greater commitment to the defence and promotion of sexual and reproductive health and rights.
- Promote decolonisation processes linked to racism and violence, within and outside the Alliance.
- Promote the full realisation of human rights of all people and oppose any legislation or action threatening the lives and physical and mental integrity of LGBTQI+ people.

We affirm the commitments made by regional Gender Justice Communities of Practices, to be implemented in all regions and levels in the alliance:

- Empower women and girls to achieve sustainable development and economic growth in Africa. This includes ensuring access to **education, economic opportunities, and leadership roles** to build stronger, more equitable societies.
- Affirm women in leadership in our own organisations and ensure our organisations reflect our gender justice work, including **addressing power relations in structures and organisational culture** in Asia-Pacific.

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- To conduct a critical and constant analysis of the impact of weak democracies in our region and **promote critical readings of fundamentalisms** at a global level, which threaten the existing rights of women in Latin America and the Caribbean.
- **Affirm women and girls' rights** in our collective responses to the war in Gaza, recognizing the short and long-term impacts in Palestine and the Middle East.

We call upon United Nations Member States and Agencies to:

- Scale up action to end **Gender-Based Violence**, which is a violation of human rights. We must take immediate action to prevent and eliminate all forms of GBV, addressing the root causes, to financially support programmes to prevent and address violence, and to facilitate access to justice.
- Create enabling environments for women and girls to be **economically empowered** and access their economic rights, including reforming unequal family laws.
- Seek paths, protocols and policies that guarantee **security for defenders of human rights** in the territories.
- Promote decolonisation processes linked to racism and violence.
- Strengthen women's participation in **peacebuilding** and ensure the full and meaningful participation of women in peace and reconciliation processes.
- Address gender inequalities when tackling **forced migrations**, and the gendered impact on the lives and security of women and girls.
- Recognize and implement the Yogyakarta Principles at national and international level to fully **ensure the human rights of LGBTQI+** people and substantially increase funding to LGBTQI+-led organizations.
- Engage in challenging conversations and foster meaningful dialogues on the dignity of LGBTQI+ people and SOGIE rights, within a framework of do-no-harm.

A majority of the assembly has declared itself in agreement with the opinions expressed in this statement. While many ACT members agree with the public statement, there are members who have expressed differing perspectives on the content or tone. Their decision reflects the diverse viewpoints within our alliance, and we respect their choice to abstain or vote against. As always, we value the collective dialogue and encourage continued discussions on the matter at hand, recognizing the strength of our unity in diversity.