



US WOMEN'S CAUCUS AT THE UN

October 27, 2020

The Honorable Michael Pompeo
Secretary of State
US Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington DC 20520

Dear Secretary Pompeo:

The US Women's Caucus at the UN is disappointed and utterly dismayed at the absence of the United States at the most important milestone for women and girls in years: the 25th anniversary of the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women. That conference in China in 1995 produced the landmark Beijing Platform for Action, the most progressive blueprint ever for advancing the human rights of women and girls.

The importance of the Beijing 25th anniversary cannot be overstated. It was evident through the extensive national, regional, and global preparatory activities and celebrations conducted by UN member states and other stakeholders.

The October 1 anniversary at the UN General Assembly featured video statements by the highest ranking official of many UN member states including Angela Merkel of Germany, Xi Jinping of China, Emmanuel Macron of France, and Justin Trudeau of Canada as well as female prime ministers and presidents from Denmark, Iceland, Norway, Switzerland, Ethiopia, Georgia, Nepal, and Bolivia. These leaders highlighted their country's important advances and progress for women since 1995 such as the increasing numbers of girls in school, female advancement in the labor force, and the rise of women in politics illustrated by many speakers themselves. Many leaders highlighted the role of women during the COVID pandemic, staffing hospitals, caring for the sick, and teaching children in lockdown at home. The leaders addressed the many problems that remain, especially the rise in domestic violence sparked by the pandemic, and committed their countries to work vigorously toward advancing the well-being of women and girls.

Instead of appearing at the anniversary observance, the US chose instead to issue a short statement from a Cabinet official, not from the head of state nor even from the vice-president.

In the statement, the US did not detail the real progress made by American women over the past decades in education, business, government, and the sciences. Nor did it propose any bold new policy ideas on how women's lives could be improved. The US decided instead to criticize and focus on the deficiencies of other governments, namely Venezuela, Iran, and China.

There were no suggestions on areas where the US itself could improve the lives of women at home or abroad. The US has not passed the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) and it stands virtually alone among

the countries of the world in not ratifying the Convention to End All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). It has not reauthorized the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) nor ratified the Inter-American Convention of Belem do Para on violence against women. The country lacks any national standards on infant and maternal care or paid maternity leave and American women continue to be paid less than men in all fields. Much work can and needs to be done in all areas of society.

It is heartbreaking to see how the US has abandoned its leadership role at the UN on women's rights. The UN was founded 75 ago under the US leadership of Franklin Roosevelt. His wife Eleanor later led the effort at the UN to draft the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, now the basis for all human rights legislation around the world. Another US First Lady, Hillary Clinton, electrified the Beijing Conference by declaring, "Human rights are women's rights and women's rights are human rights."

As an organization representing US non-governmental organizations recognized by the UN Council of Economic and Social Affairs working to improve the rights of women, we truly lament the direction the US government has taken towards its female population and the way US standing has fallen at the UN and in the eyes of the world in this regard.

We ask that our government leaders respond to the urgent need for women to assume a place of equity and justice, and that they voice both public and official support for initiatives such as the Beijing +25 celebration at the UN.

American women deserve much better from their government. They are asking for equality. They certainly deserve no less.

Yours sincerely,

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