

UNITED NATIONS PRESIDENT OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY: CIVIL SOCIETY TOWN HALL MEETING
Palais des Nations Geneva, February 27, 2024

Thank you for taking time to listen to civil society- this very under-valued aspect of peacebuilding and development- which you highlighted in your Vision Statement. One of the four Watchwords you mentioned was “**progress**”. Most simply, are we better off than we were? If not, what a shame- given the platform for **progress** we have in the United Nations.

The NGO Committee on the Status of Women in Geneva is working diligently as hosts for the regional Civil Society Forum for the Beijing+30 in October. We have created Working Groups, including teams of bright, still hopeful young women. Together we are looking into the **progress** made since 1995 in the Beijing Platform for Action, a truly foundational document. But where is **progress** if we still need to fight to include “all women and girls” in texts and agreed conclusions?

In just one area, “education”, also your priority, we discovered many indicators, early warnings in past recommendations and agreed conclusions that did not reach implementation. We discovered that since 1995, the UN has been urging States to equip all women and girls with a quality education that prepared them for the technological revolution that was just beginning. It is now obvious that the proliferation of digital technology and digital services has made quality education indispensable, and universally available.

All women and girls who are not educated and trained to control technology risk being second class citizens, isolated from local, national, and global communities and being unable to achieve the political, social, cultural or economic development. While we can repeat and insist that universal access to the digital world is a human right for all, it has not been realized due to preventable gaps in communication. **Progress** is measured by real change. There is a gap in our working methods, and what should be an uninterrupted circular flow among all stakeholders is frankly, too often clogged. Fault lies on all sides, but there are some excellent models of good practice in multi stakeholder collaboration that should be spotlighted.

As Civil Society representatives who have fought to have- and still fight to maintain our consultative relations with the UN and have a wealth of local knowledge and experience to bring to the table, we find ourselves blocked as if inconsequential. However, without our vantage point and the link we offer, decisions will need recalibration later, losing precious time- as evidenced in not preparing all our girls properly for today’s technological age.

NGOs have been regrouping to be more efficient for governments and the United Nations, but we call for more reciprocation- as in meetings like today’s. Thank you, Your Excellency. The UN will greatly benefit in opening its doors wider: thoughtfully including more women and youth with local expertise. From early assessment programs, strategic planning, decision-making and, critically, implementation, **progress** will be frustrated if any one step is missing.

Question: "What proposals would the President have for improving government and non-state understanding and collaboration, especially with reference to intergovernmental fora that are without agreed guidelines to seriously include CSO /NGO's ?



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