



From Revitalization to Renewal: Reimagining Justice and Feminist Leadership at CSW70

NGO Forum at CSW70 Parallel Event
Friday, March 13

At a pivotal moment for multilateralism, the parallel event “From Revitalization to Renewal: Advancing Access to Justice and Strengthening the Gender Equality Architecture for the UN We Need,” held as part of the NGO Forum at the [70th session of the Commission on the Status of Women \(CSW70\)](#), brought together representatives of civil society organizations, youth leaders, grassroots activists, local and regional governments, and UN stakeholders to reflect on the future of global governance. Co-convened by the Coalition for the UN We Need (C4UN), the [Cities for CEDAW History and Futures Project](#), and partners, the event examined how CSW revitalization, the [UN80 reform agenda](#), and the [Pact for the Future](#) can help advance access to justice, protect and strengthen the UN’s gender equality architecture, and promote more inclusive and accountable multilateralism



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Opening the session, Ms. Soon-Young Yoon, Founder and Co-Director of the Cities for CEDAW History and Futures Project, set the tone by situating the conversation within a



- rapidly shifting global landscape shaped by the Pact for the Future, the UN80 Initiative, and broader transformations in multilateral governance. She emphasized both the complexity and the urgency of the moment, noting that “we have a unique opportunity and responsibility to ensure that gender equality, access to justice, and feminist leadership are at the heart of the process.”

In a video message, Mr. Adam Lupel, Executive Director of the Coalition for the UN We Need (C4UN), underscored the importance of collective action in a challenging geopolitical context. While acknowledging rising conflict and fragmentation, he reminded participants that “hope is a warrior emotion. And we are in the good fight.” His remarks highlighted the need to strengthen multilateral institutions while ensuring they remain inclusive, accountable, and responsive to the needs of present and future generations.

Delivering the keynote address, Ms. Lopa Banerjee, Director of the Civil Society Division at [UN Women](#), offered a stark assessment of the current state of multilateralism. “We meet at a dangerous crossroads for the United Nations,” she stated, warning that “the rule of law is giving way to the rule of force” and that women’s rights risk becoming bargaining tools in geopolitical negotiations. At the same time, she pointed to signs of resilience, emphasizing that feminist multilateralism continues to advance through solidarity, coalition-building, and what she described as ethical persistence across institutions and movements.

The event also acknowledged the absence of Ms. Fatemah Khafagy, co-convenor of the [Arab Feminist Network](#), and Ms. Lina Abou Habib, Director of the [Asfari Institute for Civil Society and Citizenship at the American University of Beirut](#), who were unable to attend due to the ongoing situation in the Middle East and contributed through written statements. Their messages highlighted the structural barriers to participation faced by many feminist actors and the urgent realities of conflict. As Ms. Khafagy stressed in her statement, “CSW cannot be global without our participation... there is no CSW without us,” while Ms. Abou Habib emphasized the need for CSW to move from “procedural revitalization to genuine renewal.”

Across two rounds of discussion, panelists explored how CSW revitalization could move beyond procedural reform toward meaningful transformation. Ms. Emilia Saiz, Secretary General of [United Cities and Local Governments](#), offered a critical perspective on current reform trajectories. While acknowledging progress, she cautioned that “active participation is no longer enough... we need now to be part of the policy making somehow.” Her intervention underscored concerns that reforms framed around efficiency could unintentionally limit inclusive participation rather than expand it.



• • Ms. Oluwaseun Ayodeji Osowobi, [SDG Young Leader](#) with the [UN Youth Office](#), emphasized the central role of youth leadership in shaping justice systems. “Young women and girls are not just beneficiaries of the justice system. We are often first responders, organizers, and innovators,” she noted. She called for a shift from consultation to co-creation, with youth-led and grassroots organizations directly integrated into decision-making and accountability processes.

Mr. Christian Ngendahimana, Executive Director of [ISOKO Partners for Peace and Gender Equality](#), brought a peacebuilding perspective grounded in field experience. He highlighted that “justice reform succeeds only when communities trust the institutions being rebuilt,” emphasizing that community-based organizations must be treated as partners rather than just as implementers. His recommendations focused on co-design, long-term partnerships, and direct support to grassroots actors working in fragile and conflict-affected contexts.

A consistent theme throughout the discussion was the gap between global commitments and local realities. As Ms. Osowobi stressed, “the credibility of the global gender equality architecture depends on whether commitments lead to tangible change in the lives of women and girls.” Strengthening accountability therefore requires not only robust monitoring systems and data, but also the protection of civic space and meaningful inclusion of those most affected by inequality.

The discussion also highlighted the need for more inclusive and representative global governance, including renewed calls for feminist leadership at the highest levels of the United Nations as member states prepare to select the next Secretary-General and stronger integration of diverse stakeholders into decision-making processes.

In closing remarks delivered by video, Mr. Richard Ponzio, Senior Fellow and Director of the Global Governance, Justice and Security Program at the [Stimson Center](#), emphasized the importance of sustaining momentum beyond CSW70, particularly in monitoring the implementation of the Pact for the Future. He highlighted the need to translate commitments into action, noting that the Pact is “a call to action, not just a negotiated outcome,” and underscoring the role of civil society, research institutions, and multilateral actors in advancing gender equality across interconnected global agendas.

The event ultimately underscored that revitalizing CSW, and strengthening the UN more broadly, requires more than institutional reform. It demands a renewed commitment to





justice, inclusion, and accountability, grounded in the lived realities of women and girls and driven by the leadership of civil society, youth, and grassroots movements.

Additional Resources:

- See video this event: [Here](#)
- Opening remarks by Adam Lupel are available: [Here](#)
- Closing remarks by Richard Ponzio can be viewed: [Here](#)

