

Asia Pacific sign on letter: accountability for the GEF commitments and civil society engagement. Deadline is 15 August 2021.

Dear XXXX,

We write to you as XX intersectional feminist civil society (CS) organizations in the region of Asia and the Pacific. We are encouraged by the recent Generation Equality Forum (GEF) opportunity to build momentum and strengthen commitments to gender equality and empowerment across the globe. We are pleased to see the 40 billion USD raised from multiple stakeholders towards this goal and towards achieving the targets and commitments of the GEF Action Coalition blueprints.

However, we wish to express our strong concern that Asia and the Pacific was not prioritized; with a lack of engagement and a lack of resources for the region in the GEF and its development. Asia Pacific is home to the world's largest population, with over 60% of the world's youth. It is the most vulnerable to climate-related disasters, disproportionately affecting women and marginalized groups. Almost 40% of women in South-East Asia and up to 68% of women in the Pacific experience sexual and gender-based violence from intimate partners¹. The Pacific region has some of the lowest rates of women in national legislative bodies on the globe. GEF was envisioned as a space to position some of these issues with our governments and we expected that the Paris Forum would provide a platform to raise our critical collective advocacy issues.

Yet, we observed that no government from Asia or the Pacific took part in the Paris opening or closing ceremonies; feminist leadership was not well represented throughout the forum and specific groups like sex workers and trans people were excluded. This is a huge missed opportunity to advance the gender equality agenda across our region and accurately represent global Generation Equality realities. We call urgent attention to the disappointing lack of financial commitments at GEF to the Feminist Action and Climate Justice AC, as Asia and the Pacific are already dealing daily with massive loss and damage from the climate and ecological emergency².

We are also deeply concerned about the lack of accessibility of the online platform – the timing and languages of GEF events posed a barrier for feminists from our region, and the platform technology didn't take into account accessibility from regions far away from Europe. There was an unacceptable lack of disability-related accessibility, including sign language interpretation, closed captioning or screen reader accessibility (in multiple languages). Language is a substantial barrier to participation for women, girls and others who do not understand either English or French. The GEF Paris platform did not work well overall, and many sessions were severely disrupted by buffering, moderator issues, back-end technical staff being overheard during the sessions, and other technical issues.

¹ The World Health Organization, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and South African Medical Research Council (2013). 'Global and regional estimates of violence against women: Prevalence and health effects of intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence' p 16, 20

² The lack of political will and financial commitments belies CEDAW General Recommendation 37 (2018) which acknowledges that climate change is a core women's human rights issue, linked to all aspects of socio-economic and environmental rights, gender-based violence, conflict, migration and displacement.

If Generation Equality truly seeks to be more inclusive, such barriers must be removed. Without guaranteeing the participation of those marginalized by ableism, heteronormativity, patriarchy and colonial legacies, we shall never achieve gender equality, and “leaving no one behind” will simply be empty rhetoric. The GEF must adhere to and exemplify the core Action Coalition (AC) principles of “intersectionality, feminist leadership and transformation”.

In moving the process forward, we shall continue to engage in good faith but require increased accountability and transparency in content, structure and process. We feel that by working collectively, we can ensure that countries in Asia and the Pacific are mobilized to build momentum for gender equality, and ensure accountability for GEF commitments and ensure they are speedily devolved to grassroots, indigenous and local women and feminist-led groups, on the ground.

We recommend:

- Transforming the Action Coalitions into inclusive Communities of Practice with full accessibility, and establishing regional communities of practice with resources for regional UN offices and development institutions to support engagement of intersectional feminists and women in all their diversity, including those in urban poor, informal settlements, rural and maritime areas, sex workers, LGBTQI+, non-binary people and people living with disabilities, from across the region;
- Making available adequate, sustainable and flexible funding to civil society, feminist, women, community and grass-roots, and youth-led organisations;
- Establishing a strong and effective accountability framework at regional, national and global levels by the end of the year to monitor commitments made by all Action Coalition leaders and commitment-makers;
- Engaging with intersectional feminists and civil society groups in the region to advocate with governments, regional development institutions and funders to properly resource and implement a robust and inclusive accountability framework that evaluates transformative impact at the grassroots level;
- Urgent fundraising by GEF for the work of the Feminist Action and Climate Justice AC, and a global cross-AC campaign to increase political will on climate change, ecological and gender equality;
- Strengthening engagement with multi-stakeholder groups across the region as the GEF process continues to be planned and implemented, including all future fora and accountability mechanisms, to ensure that no one in our region is left out in the future.

We look forward to shared leadership and action in ensuring that GEF Commitments and the Action Coalitions advance gender equality and support the realization of women’s human rights for an equal, just, peaceful and ecologically sustainable future across all regions of the world, including Asia and the Pacific.
