



Speech by Rosa Pavanelli, PSI General Secretary on the occasion of the “High-Level Thematic Debate on Advancing Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women and Girls for a Transformative Post-2015 Development Agenda” convened by the President of the UN General Assembly

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Within a few days, we will celebrate International Women’s Day and once again, we will have to underline how badly the economic crisis and austerity measures have contributed to increase inequalities between women and men.

Indeed, women’s condition in Europe and around the world is today worse than in 2008 at the beginning of the crisis. Cuts in public spending have created the highest level of unemployment and women have been the first to suffer because of lay-offs, firing and precarious jobs. Those women who do have a job are witnessing increasing discrimination and a widening of the pay gap with their male colleagues.

Reduction of public services is influencing the lifestyle of our communities secluding more and more women at home attending to children and elderly care no longer provided by public services. In the EU, in particular, the implementation of brutal austerity reforms have severely impacted on women’s conditions putting the glorious “European social model” at stake, and, in many countries, reducing it to a nostalgic memory.

Violence and sexual harassment against women, both at home and at the workplace, have reached an alarming level in all countries, becoming a real global emergency. The deterioration of the social and cultural values of our societies is shown also by the unacceptable number of femicides that no government seems to be able (or willing) to address properly. Of course, the growing influence of religious fundamentalism represents a threat to the respect of human rights as well as to the lives of women in many countries returning their living conditions back to the middle ages. In addition, the persisting attempts of many governments to reduce women’s reproductive rights continue to constitute a violence that is no longer acceptable.

If this is the picture, there should be very little to celebrate on the 20th Anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action. It is a shame that 20 years after, we need to say that the hopes of Beijing Declaration have been largely betrayed and most part of the Platform remains unfulfilled.

Even where the fight of women have conquered important achievements, our successes are not secured forever and the fight is not over.

We need to keep on mobilizing and advocating for gender equality, working hard again to ensure that women’s rights are not only declared in political statements, but that they become the real priority in the political agenda of both the international institutions and national governments.

Indeed, we now have the opportunity to advocate for a deep change, as 2015 is a strategic year. In fact, the negotiations to re-address the global strategy of the post-2015 Agenda for the year to come are taking place right now.

The 59th session of the UNCSW, starting next week will focus on the evaluation of the Beijing Platform. PSI, with its affiliates, will be there to expose the responsibility of the international institutions as well as national governments that missed the objectives of the Beijing Platform, to highlight the contradictions of the many governments and states that continue to discriminate women. Above all, PSI will be at the UNCSW to advocate for a proactive agenda that will eliminate

gender discrimination while promoting the implementation of policies that will ensure gender equality. We need to re-affirm that equality can be achieved, but only if all women can enjoy the right to education, the right to healthcare, the right to work and to equal pay, and the right to be free from all violence and abuse.

UN Women has recently launched a Call for Action for gender equality, the empowerment and leadership of women. This is a necessary step to filling the gap for women to participate in the decision-making process and to take leadership roles at all levels of society and the political system. However, there will be no gender equality if too many obstacles prevent women from accessing the labour market and discrimination against women at the workplace persists. In fact, there will be no shared power or responsibility if women do not have the same opportunities as men in education and at work.

Trade unions play a fundamental role in ensuring equality in working conditions. We don't have to be shy in exposing the responsibility of those governments which have increased discrimination by freezing collective bargaining, reducing unions rights and imposing labour reforms that are contributing to nothing but higher unemployment and higher inequality as even IMF statistics have now recognised.

In PSI, we know that access to quality public services can make a difference for many women to be able to work. Many analysts recognise that increasing the number of women workers will contribute to growth much more than austerity packages. We firmly believe that to overcome the crisis and create the conditions for sustainable development, governments need to invest in public services, rather than cut public spending. Childcare and elderly care services, education and healthcare are sectors that can really stimulate women employment while ensuring the economic growth of society and a higher quality of life for people.

The UN Sustainable Development Goals and Financing for Development negotiations will frame the post-2015 Agenda. Despite the evidence of the disaster produced by the last seven years of crisis, the debate is still oriented to enlarge and ensure the role that private capital can play for the future sustainable development and economic growth, including in the gender perspective.

PSI is participating in the UN negotiations to advocate for change, to lobby for an urgent alternative to the current neo-liberal policy.

This is why PSI is campaigning to oppose trade agreements, such as TTIP and TISA, which favour multinational corporations and finance instead of people and the environment, and are a real threat to democracy.

This is why PSI is lobbying for tax reforms that will put an end to tax avoidance and will impose on multinational corporations to pay their fair-share and contribute to an alternative to budget cuts.

This is why PSI continues to advocate for public investments in public services, because we know that this is the way to support the social and environmental sustainability of economic growth.

This is why PSI is keeps on fighting until decent work, workers' and trade union rights are fully recognised. We do this with a gender perspective, as we are perfectly aware that neo-liberal policies and austerity measures make women more vulnerable.

Nobody can enjoy freedom and prosperity without ensuring women's basic human rights - we know that the time to change is now.