



**GENERATION  
EQUALITY**

# YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE GENERATION EQUALITY FORUM

## JUAN PABLO POLI

*“Human rights are women’s rights, and women’s rights are human rights.” – Hillary Rodham Clinton*

This declaration will sound familiar to most, although many may not know where it originated.

In September of 1995 more than 30,000 leaders, activists, and women from around the world gathered together in Beijing, China for the Fourth World Conference on Women. It was Hillary Rodham Clinton, then the First Lady of the United States, who said these words which have, in time, been transformed into a declaration of principles.

Why open a zine about the future of gender equality talking about 1995? Not only was the Fourth World Conference on Women a unique event in terms of its size and scope, but also in terms of its outcome: the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, an agenda signed by 189 countries that sets forth goals, objectives, and commitments to achieve gender equality across 12 sectors.

It may be assumed that something achieved 25 years ago in the gender equality movement would be outdated or passé today, but make no mistake: even today, the Platform for Action is still

the world's most forward-thinking and ambitious agreement in terms of gender equality.

Like many other multi-lateral agreements, the Platform has been subject to occasional revisions. But its 25th anniversary was not just any milestone. The year 2020 also marked the 75th anniversary of the formation of the United Nations, 10 years of UN Women, 20 years since Resolution 1325 (Women, Peace, and Security), 5 years since Resolution 2250 (Youth, Peace, and Security), and 5 years of Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development. All of these milestones mark the beginning of a decade for Fundamental Action in achieving international SDGs and gender equality, which is why the Generation Equality Forum (GEF)—the name given to the revision process—has been faced with an unprecedented challenge.

The GEF is a global initiative centered on co-participation between the UN, civil society, governments, philanthropic entities, academia, and the private sector to attain clear objectives in pursuit of gender equality through intersectional and intergenerational processes. It is coordinated by UN Women and organized jointly by the governments of Mexico and France, along with members of the civil society. Originally planned for March and July 2020 respectively, the Mexico and Paris Forums were to be opportunities to bring together these stakeholders. But the COVID-19 pandemic has delayed the process until 2021.

Initially, the Forum's governance structure was formed of UN Women, Mexico, France, and the Civil Society Advisory Group (CSAG) composed of grassroots activists and scholars, which make up the Core Group. A steering committee was also established, comprising a number of stakeholders, together with the Beijing+25 Youth Task Force as well as Mexico and France's civil society advisory groups, all with consulting roles. This broad framework of actors was to work on the design, implementation, and monitoring of the Forum, which would culminate in the launch of six Action Coalitions.

**What are Action Coalitions?** Action Coalitions are global groups formed by governments, civil society, youth organizations, the private sector, philanthropic entities, and UN agencies. They will focus their actions and take on commitments in six priority areas:

- Gender based violence (GBV)
- Economic rights and justice
- Bodily autonomy, and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR)
- Feminist action for climate justice
- Technology and innovation for gender equality
- Feminist movements and leadership

In addition to the leaders chosen during 2020, a set of "Commitment Makers" will be involved to work together over the next 5 years. Representing governments, civil society, private sector,



UN agencies and other constituencies, they will have a central role in monitoring, promoting and implementing the actions, goals and objectives set forth in the programs of each Action Coalition.

#### YOUTH INVOLVEMENT IN THE GEF

One of the central axes of the revision process will be intergenerational cooperation and the possibility of connecting a generation of activists who attended Beijing 1995 with younger generations who have driven and bolstered the feminist movement in recent years. This is why the presence of young people at the GEF and throughout the process is essential—we have a newfound perspective on and vision of equality that would benefit the goals of the Forum. The purpose of this zine is to draw attention to the youth journey, the challenges and obstacles we faced on our way to the GEF, emphasizing how we co-created our leadership, and how we transformed the process into one more accountable, intergenerational and intersectional.

To tell this story, we must go back a few years to August of 2019 when the configuration of the Beijing+25 Youth Task Force (YTF) was first announced as an advisory group within UN Women, ensuring the presence of young voices at the Generation Equality Forum. The governance structure of the GEF had been established months prior (around June) and was already in place, meaning that we were “boarding” a moving train, and our ability to change its course was limited.

This did not yet pose a problem for us. The first months of our work were filled with ideas, projects, hopes, and expectations for the process, believing that the process itself would be a space in which we could develop ourselves and assume a central role. But our group of 30 quickly realized that our contributions could not be purely advisory: We were there as representatives of young people all over the world. If we were not present in the spaces where decisions were being made, all the fuss being made about “intergenerationality” was just for show.

This was how the struggle began, with all its victories and losses, to earn a place in the governance structure of the GEF. One of the first achievements we made was our involvement in the GEF’s planning meetings. Next, in the 64<sup>th</sup> Commission on the Status of Women (main global intergovernmental body dedicated to the promotion of gender equality), we organized a Global Youth Review and an Intergenerational Dialogue within the official program. Finally, during the selection process for the leaders of the Action Coalitions, we were not only part of the Selection Committee, but we also achieved the reopening of applications to include organizations led by young people, absent on the first call for applications.

Many of these efforts were cut short by the COVID-19 pandemic. The CSW took place virtually, with no participation from civil so-

ciety, and the Mexico and Paris Forums were postponed until 2021, making joint collaboration more difficult. There was a great deal of uncertainty, and so much of our work appeared to fade away. What were we doing there? What was our role?

These and other doubts began to arise within the YTF and one thing seemed clear: If we did not have a seat at the table where decisions were being made, our presence there had no meaning. We knew it would not be easy, since the governance structure had been created more than a year prior and was already well underway. Incorporating a new actor—and not a passive one at that—could alter the process.

For brevity's sake, we can dispense with the details of this particular journey, but let me assure you that it was not easy. We built alliances, created strategies, weighed risks; we did everything in our power, making both good and bad decisions along the way. In response to our insistent demands to be included in the Core Group, we were accused of being insufficiently representative; this is what led us, after some consultation, to incorporate an additional 10 members to remedy some of these representation gaps. Finally, in September 2020, we were accepted into the governance structure, and to the various working groups within the Core Group.

Our role had changed and the team had grown. We were no longer an advisory group with a limited role: This was a new chapter for us. This is why we decided to rename ourselves as the Generation Equality Youth Task Force. Towards the end of 2020, the landscape was still uncertain: We were present in the vast majority of the spaces within the GEF, but the mechanisms had not changed fundamentally. We had a seat at the table; but this did not translate to a change in the way decisions were made, the power dynamics or the functioning of the space. What to do? We decided to focus on alliances: Alliances are always the answer.

After a year of advocating for inclusion we were no longer alone: UN Women had assembled a group of 300 young activists for gender equality from all over the world under the National Gender Youth Activists. Then young leaders were included into the Action Committees—upon our insistence and the civil society support—and we gained young allies within the CSAG, who had supported us throughout the process. The landscape was now more favorable.

This was how we began to meet and associate with all the young people participating in the process, to discuss our issues, share experiences, devise proposals, and above all, to realize that we were in this together. Unfortunately, the experience within the GEF was similar for all of us, which made us aware

that increasing diversity was not enough and it did not bring change or transformation itself. For us to unfold our transformative power, we need to be given real power, leadership and co-ownership.

This was how the idea arose of recording all of these challenges in a document that presents a young feminist vision of the GEF and outlines how the GEF would look if youth were truly in leadership. Also, it contains clear recommendations on how to work intergenerationally, being accountable, promoting meaningful youth participation and supporting youth financing. Co-created in early 2021 by the Action Coalition youth leaders, the NGYA, members of the YTF, Mexican CSAG and the global CSAG, the “Young Feminist Manifesto - A Bold And Transformative Vision For Change” was launched in March 2021 during the Mexico Forum.

It was the alliances we had forged that allowed us to come this far. We can now say that that faraway goal has, in large part, been achieved. We are not confined to a secondary role—which has always gone hand-in-hand with being young—but, through responsibility, compromise and a clear vision of our role inside the GEF we aimed higher. Our journey shows how important it is to create youth-led and safe spaces for us, where we can address and speak freely about the issues we are facing, without fear of how that may affect our careers or be detrimental for our future development. Youth-led spaces made it possible to overcome this fear.





**FEMINISM**  
**FROM THE EYES OF AN**  
**HIV-POSITIVE**  
**WOMAN**

**DOREEN MORAA**  
**MORACHA**

The spread of HIV is a gender issue. For the ages 15 to 25, three in every five new HIV infections globally are among women.<sup>1</sup> For women worldwide ages 15 to 49, HIV- and AIDS-related illnesses are the leading cause of death.<sup>2</sup> Gender-based discrimination and patriarchal norms are a great hinderance to the HIV response when it comes to access to treatment, prevention, and sexual and reproductive health and rights services. We can't end HIV if we do not address inequalities women face, many of which are catalyzed by tradition and religion.

A woman's vulnerability to contracting HIV is directly related to the gender inequality she faces. In some contexts, girls and women perform the roles of unpaid caregivers to the ill, their siblings, the elderly, and people living with HIV. The mental health of these women and girls is one aspect left under-recognized in our health care. Women experiencing forms of depression can in some cases lead to making uninformed sexual choices where they are too vulnerable to negotiate for safe sex, exposing them to other STIs and unplanned pregnancies.

Furthermore, within extremely patriarchal societies, women have little to no control over their bodies in their sexual relationships. Societal pressures for men to have several sexual partners and to dislike condoms, economic inequality, and sometimes even gender-based sexual violence or the fear of violence lowers the ability of women to negotiate for safe sex with their partners.

Female sex workers are also severely discriminated against and face violence from their clients, the police, and the laws that criminalize sex work. The stigmatization they face excludes them from reporting any abuse incurred by male clients, exposing them to assault and HIV exposure. Thanks to umbrella bodies such as the Kenya Sex Workers Association, they are being educated on safe sex, how to protect themselves and even being nursed back to health after being beaten and injured. But when will their rights and work be protected? When will governments change their policies to acknowledge sex work as work, and sex workers as deserving of workers' rights?

Services for adolescent girls and young women are failing to reach those who are falling the furthest behind and are at greatest risk of experiencing gender-based violence, becoming sexually exploited, and even being exposed to drug use. When girls can't uphold their human rights, especially their sexual and reproductive health and rights, efforts to get to zero exclusion, zero discrimination, zero violence, and zero stigma are undermined.

The strategies to change that reality, even though they are works in progress, are imperfect and underfunded. While there is a focus on biomedical processes—especially the newly-approved dapivirine ring, which could prove to be a better intervention than the female condom—psycho-social programs and commu-



nity initiatives have either died a natural death or are severely under-resourced.

Feminism demands “nothing for us, without us.” We cannot address the inequalities in the HIV response without transgender women, cisgender women, and adolescent girls all at the table with policymakers and with a hand in its implementation.

To maximize women’s health, policymakers need to understand the barriers to prevention and treatment from the eyes and perspectives of these women themselves. It is unfair to give hope to women living with HIV that they can give birth to HIV-negative children, then go ahead and refuse to release pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) to prevent highly exposed infants from infection. Governments, donors and policymakers need to see from the community perspective and to learn exactly how to respond to the gaps in the HIV response when it comes to women. Sub-Saharan Africa has 15-year-old girls getting infected with HIV at high rates and we cannot normalize that! The provision of HIV services and protection of the rights of adolescent girls need to be stepped up.

I can go on and on about the failure in the HIV response and the inequalities we feel as women living with HIV, how not enough is being done and dwindling funds are failing us, but we need solutions, now. With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic women have once again been left behind: vulnerable to losing jobs with a rise in gender-based violence and femicide. But in view of the Generation Equality Forum in Paris I have a call to action for women and men to be brought to the table. Epidemics are not a one-gender problem. We need to break societal norms and empower, engage, and educate both women and men that we are all human; we deserve equal treatment and just because I am a woman doesn’t mean I can’t negotiate for safe sex, or I can’t choose how many children to have. I have a voice—it needs to be heard by policy-makers, by health care workers, by donors, and by governments.

There is no one-fits-all approach to solving the inequalities experienced by women and girls when it comes to the HIV response, but we need a human-centered approach that better targets integrated services and puts women at the center. We need comprehensive sex education, stronger legal protection from intimate partner violence, proper health care services—especially in adapting to a universal health care system— and economic sustainability for women and girls.

I call upon stakeholders to prioritize gender equality in all their implementations in the HIV response because gender-blind interventions continue to fuel inequalities. Sustainable economic empowerment for women and girls in all their diversities is needed not just in cash transfer programs. Empowering women to be economically independent puts them in a position where

they are no longer at risk of compromising their health, such as with period poverty which sees women having sex in exchange for sanitary towels out of desperation. Comprehensive sex education should also be implemented in schools because it gives adolescent girls information on their own sexual health and teaches them how to negotiate for safe sex or abstain. HIV infections are extremely high for girls between the ages of 14 and 24—let's not leave our girls behind.

We have made gains in the HIV response, but we have left the most vulnerable behind. We cannot continue like this if indeed we want to end the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

**An empowered woman is an empowered world!**

If you want to engage and get involved, follow **I AM A BEAUTIFUL STORY** on Facebook and Youtube, **Positive Young Women Voices**, **AYARHEP**, **Women Fighting HIV & AIDS in Kenya (WOFAK)**, and **BHESP (Bar Hostess Kenya)**—an organization focused on helping female sex workers in Kenya.

1. UNAIDS, *Women and HIV: A Spotlight on Adolescent Girls and Young Women*, 2019.
2. UNAIDS, *Women, Adolescent Girls and The HIV Response*, 2020.

# A NEW ERA OF LATIN AMERICAN FEMINISM

## ANA SÁENZ DE TEJADA



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The most recent feminist movements have brought about a powerful force for change that transcends the borders between Latin American nations. What happens in one country becomes a precedent that goes on to inspire young feminists in another. The criminalization of abortion, surges in femicide, abductions, violence, inequality, and sexual harassment are rallying cries for feminists in Latin America to come together to confront all of these issues. Since 2020, peaceful protests in Mexico have evolved to include forms of activism aimed at drawing the attention of the Mexican government and the world at large to the reality of gender violence in their country, which ranks as one of the most dangerous places for women, with an estimated 10 femicides taking place every day. Activists and groups in Mexico have been a source of inspiration for feminist protest throughout the Latin American region.

In Argentina, movements demanding the right to abortion as an issue of public health have drawn support from all over the world. Thanks to the perseverance and dedication of feminists who have been demanding this right for the past four decades, they achieved their objective of legalizing the practice late last year. In Chile, it was adolescents in high schools who spearheaded the social uprising that, following months of protests and police repression, would ultimately lead to the drafting of a new constitution – the first anywhere in the world to be written by an equal number of men and women.

It comes as no surprise that this achievement was led by high school students. The feminist protests and strikes that began in Chile's universities and high schools in May 2018 sparked outrage over the sexual harassment that women faced in Chile's educational establishments. These demands soon spread throughout the region. Universities in Mexico also went on strike, demanding a better system for reporting and taking action against university professors implicated in cases of sexual harassment. In Central America, Costa Rican universities saw the rise of the #MePasóenlaUNA and #MePasóenlaUCR (“#ItHappenedToMeAtUNA/UCR”) movements. These viral hashtags carrying anonymous reports of sexual harassment generated an outcry that led to the creation of new protocols to address the issue. This is a country that has succeeded in passing laws that punish sexual harassment in a variety of settings.

In Guatemala, too, female students have presented research on the data surrounding gender violence and sexual harassment in the public university, leading to public outcry and demands aimed at the educational authorities. Increasing numbers of accusations are being raised in private universities as well. Throughout the region, the pursuit of a secondary and tertiary education sector free of gender violence is now a priority.

The feminist movement is more active than ever in Latin America, with social networks becoming forums for connection and

exchange between countries, movements, organizations, and activists. The issues with which we are faced, and the various methods of mobilization that have taken place in Latin America, are enormous, and are replicated all around the region and in every space occupied by the women who live here.

How can we translate these experiences, which are so different and yet fundamentally so similar, at the Generation Equality Forum (GEF)? How can we define the region's main issues, when Latin America is made up of so many different countries, all at different stages in their human rights journeys, and with such a diverse population of women? We women face a variety of distinct issues: rural issues; indigenous issues; land sovereignty; the rights of students and girls; and sexual diversity. It seems like an impossible task, but our goal is to present the main problems facing Latin American youth to UN Women.

First, we considered the issue, which involved ensuring that these themes, all requiring urgent attention in Latin America, be translated into action at the GEF. As National Gender Youth Activists (NGYAs), we arranged meetings with organizations and activists to define the priorities within our countries, so we could then define the priorities of the region as a whole. The problem was that we then had to unite our own priorities with those of other regions, and we did not know for sure if all of our work consulting and debating would in fact be taken into account at the GEF, and most importantly, that the opinions and demands that we made as young women would have an impact in the region. Our priorities? We urgently need mechanisms to prevent violence against women; a guarantee of our sexual and reproductive rights; the creation of more spaces of decision-making for young women; and to create capacity-building opportunities, particularly for indigenous and rural women.

The efforts made by young feminists to create gender equity in Latin America are now taking place in various spaces, directly combating the criminalization and violence that manifests itself in our governments, extractivist corporations, civil society and anti-choice groups, gender violence, and femicides. We resist, but we want the GEF to take our diverse voices into serious consideration, and for all of the sectors involved in the process to participate so that we can solve the problems that affect us. Above all, we want to be given the opportunity to drive these changes within the organizations in which we are already working to solve the region's problems on a local and national level, and to be supported in organizing and coordinating on a regional level. A new era of feminism is already underway in Latin America: The Generation Equality Forum must not be left behind.

**INTIMATE PARTNER  
VIOLENCE  
AND THE AFRICAN  
CONTEXT**

**SHANTEL  
MAREKERA**



Violence is a cultural construct in that it mirrors and is informed by societal conflict and injustice. Violence acquires its power from social and cultural norms and attitudes which are used to perpetuate the continued oppression of women and girls. In terms of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), which is defined as “physical, sexual, or psychological harm by a current or former partner or spouse,” invisible power is successfully used as a tool of violent patriarchal control insofar as it is able to hide its own mechanisms. Those mechanisms are often concealed under the guises of custom, tradition, and family values. In cases of IPV in the African context, customary law often legitimises the ideals of patriarchal domination in the communal and legal handling of IPV cases.

I grew up in Zimbabwe where acts of IPV are never questioned, but normalised as “the ups and downs” of marriage despite the existence of solid legislation that directly condemns IPV. It is these microaggressions that developed in me the propensity to become an instigator of change in my sphere of influence, and inspired my insatiable desire to pursue a form of justice that transcends boundaries, generations and ethnicities. I vowed to myself that I was going to do whatever it took to understand the power dynamics involved in such cases and find ways to mitigate these injustices against women through my legal education. This led me to dedicate my time to research, advocacy and work experiences with different women’s rights organisations in a bid to stand up for the world in the way I could. I became more mindful of my role in challenging forms of institutionalized domination that affirm and shape epistemic violence around the world, an idea Iris Marion Young reiterates in her social connection model of responsibility.

I interviewed judges, police officers, IPV victims and community leaders to learn more about the underlying causes of IPV in the African setting. My heart broke when I realised that people with polarising agendas use culture to create discourses that oppress women and further their own political and personal gains. In the case of IPV, customary law (unwritten law that comes from tradition, customs and practices) is used by male figures of authority to promote gender-based violence in a bid to hold onto the gains of patriarchy.

“In my community there is nothing such as IPV, it’s just a man disciplining his wife,” says one survivor. “The relatives only tell you that listening to your husband will make him respectful towards you and he will not beat you.” Another survivor recounts, “My family laughed at me saying that I should have known that occasional beatings were part of marriage. My sister also said I talk too much, that’s why I was beaten, but if only I could learn to control my speech, married life would be easier for me.” The intimate terrorism these women experience in their marriages is enforced as customary

by the family and community who uphold the values of patriarchal dominance. Payments of bride price between families and communal support of child marriages all legitimise an abuser's assumed natural right over women, creating a culture of checks and balances that polices and suppresses women experiencing abuse. One survivor explains that, "The community tells women to just pray about it until their marriage becomes peaceful," while another says, "My family found it hard to believe me and they blamed me for the violence I had suffered. They told me not to come to them if I ever made the stupid decision of divorcing my husband over petty issues."

Beyond a woman's family and community, IPV is sanctioned and upheld by legal and governing bodies. A gendered relationship between police officers and IPV victims frequently leads to secondary victimization of IPV victims by police officers. "You even think of killing yourself," says one survivor, "because if you report to the police they will tell you to go home and be nice to your husband. If you report the incident to your relatives, they will tell you to stay strong for the sake of your marriage."

As a member of UN Women's Generation Equality Youth Task Force and a member of the Action Coalition Working Group, I can only do my small part in amplifying the voices of IPV survivors in international spaces such as the Generation Equality Forum (GEF). As a researcher, I can only do my small part in unmasking the power dynamics around IPV, and as a Rhodes scholar and a future Oxford-trained lawyer, I can do my small part in providing legal representation for IPV victims. However, the responsibility is shared by everyone in society, and greater responsibility lies with those in positions of power and privilege.

Around the African continent, youth-led organisations with the common mission to combat gender-based violence such as the Regional Network of Children and Young People Trust, Resilient Women's Organization, Empowering Women for Excellence Initiative, and WEADA are utilizing the power of the collective to change the culture around IPV in Africa. Mobilizing families and communities through the power of shared responsibility, youth leaders are ushering in the active participation of boys and young men to rebuild a society that condemns IPV and supports its survivors. All they ask for in return is co-ownership and co-leadership of the GEF process and support through resourcing and capacity-building.

**THE YOUTH AGAINST  
SLAVERY MOVEMENT**

**RACHA  
HAFFAR**



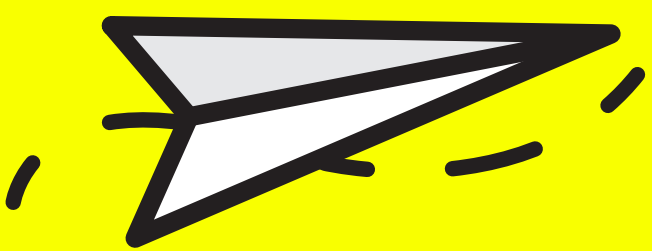


# DUBAI

When I was 14 years old, I watched a woman fall to her death. She slipped while trying to escape from a third-story window of the house where she was being held as a domestic slave. She was an Indian migrant worker held captive while her ‘owners’ travelled abroad. I stood with others on the street in disbelief. This was my first glimpse at the horrors of modern slavery. I’d soon learn that not only is slavery normalized, but it is also legalized and institutionalized through the practices of sponsorship and the kafala system in the Gulf region.

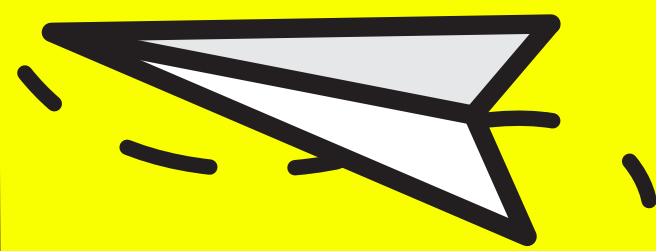
# TUNISIA

Four years later I almost fell victim to a suspicious recruitment scheme that raised the alarm for me of the potential of exploitation. Growing up in Dubai I never learned French, despite being half-Tunisian, and when I returned to Tunisia, I could never fit into the Tunisian education system as a result. The only way to pursue my education was to go abroad. Scholarships wouldn’t cover all of my expenses; I needed work. This reality is one shared by countless youth across the globe. Like so many young women with no work experience, without the luxury of being able to afford higher education, getting an au pair job was a great opportunity. I published my CV to go work in England and began receiving some tempting offers from potential ‘families.’ However, they never accepted any exchange of personal communication and turned down video and phone calls. Instead of responding to these requests they would push the urgency and lucrative nature of the opportunities, attempting to coerce a quick decision to travel. Finally, one ‘family’ provided a photo—it was clearly a stock photo. This roused my suspicions and, after researching further, I realized that this was an attempt to deceive vulnerable youth into the human trafficking and modern slavery cycle. A market into which some are lost forever.



# ITALY

Six years later I was studying for my double masters in Italy when I met a human trafficking survivor from Nigeria. She was sexually exploited and trafficked within Italy for 10 years. When I heard her story, how she came from Nigeria to Sicily on the promise of a decent job, I saw what my future could have been. She had spent a decade coerced and held within slavery by a woman they called 'mama' through threats of Voodoo and dark magic if they disobeyed in any way. Confronting this atrocious reality prompted the next stage of my journey in combatting human trafficking and modern slavery.



# TUNISIA 2.0

Once I realized that I had escaped a horrific reality that could have defined my destiny, I was further horrified by the lack of services and support provided to victims. So, I founded Not4Trade. I was 26 as I expanded my education and became familiar with the different facets of human trafficking. Soon I started identifying ways to prevent other youth from falling into these deadly traps. Once I published my masters research on "Trafficking in Women in Post-Revolution Tunisia," I saw clearly for the first time how I could change things. Realizing that there were no civil society organizations in Tunisia focused solely on human trafficking was my motivator to pave the way and take the lead for change.

My life's mission had become to educate youth and prevent them from becoming victims. Human trafficking in Tunisia has many faces, but it is the same exploitation. Migrant women and men from sub-Saharan Africa and refugees from the Middle East fall into the traps of fake jobs. Kids are forced into begging in the streets and young girls are sold into domestic slavery by their own parents. Realizing the alarming scope of the crimes and how scarce the attention to this was, I needed to do something that would reflect the urgency of such a violation of human dignity. So I started reaching out to different stakeholders. Time and time again I was faced with exclusion, rejection, and tokenism.



# USA

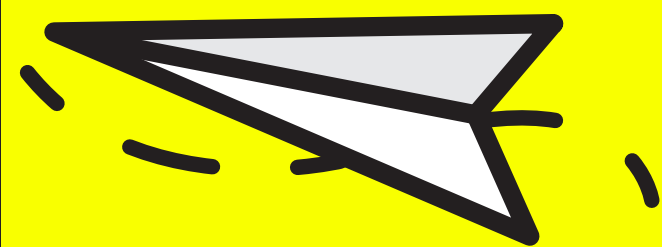
After spending years in Tunisia fighting hard to be heard and to impact others on the ground, I decided to move to the U.S. This was an attempt to find a healthier environment for my activism as I continued to develop projects to combat human trafficking and exploitation.

The Generation Equality Forum (GEF) seemed like the perfect platform for amplifying my voice and rallying more stakeholders for the cause. When I first joined, I wasn't fully aware of how political and financial influence controlled decision-making processes within international advocacy spaces. I came in wanting to believe that these spaces were shaped by the voices of those most affected and the communities we wished to serve. It is largely understood that those in power abuse their authority and that the private sector frequently exploits laborers in supply chains that are written off as the norm. For these reasons, I joined my voice with the other youth leaders within the GEF to produce our Young Feminist Manifesto.

As a young woman, I realized that the biggest challenge was to be taken seriously as an activist representing an important marginalized and often excluded constituency. These challenges could have destroyed my hope; however, they brought a new power and determination to my work. I joined this process as I believed in its potential to transform the world. I still do; however, it is crucial for us to understand that we cannot transform the world until we start on ourselves and change our own systems from the inside out.

I found myself joining forces with dozens of brave youth leaders from around the world demanding simple things like meaningful intergenerational co-leadership and accountability. When we achieve inclusion and meaningful youth engagement, we will see the changes we talk about. Unfortunately, those systems of inclusion, accountability, and intergenerational co-leadership have no infrastructure yet in our global advocacy spaces. We have united to ensure that our individual experiences facing tokenism and exclusion and our experiences facing the realities of human trafficking and modern slavery could lead to transformation.

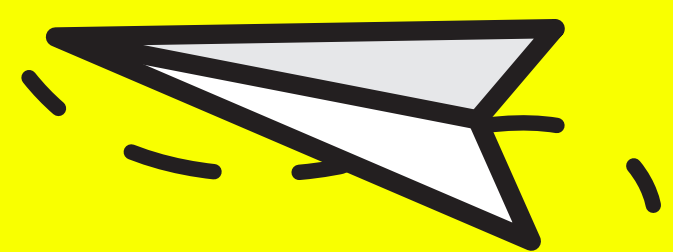
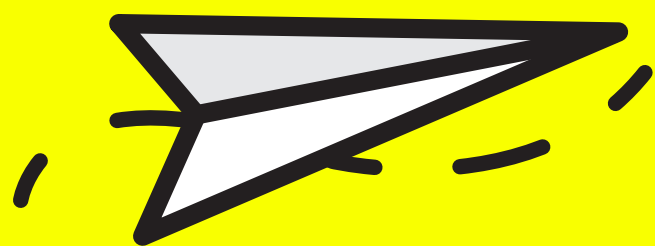
We won't reach the necessary level of impact and transformation if we continue to follow the same paths, continue to exclude each other and young voices, and engage in methods which have proven ineffective. The time of turning blind eyes to those injustices is far gone. Our humanity will become ex-





tinct if we continue to exploit our people and planet as we do currently. We are not in a privileged place of neglect and denial anymore; we cannot live like this. We need to unite; we need to work hand-in-hand to save whatever we can. There is no other path forward other than following an intersectional feminist approach.

Youth Against Slavery Movement (YASM) is empowered youth taking the steps to achieve this aim. I co-founded YASM in order to ensure that other youth had the supportive environment for activism that I had searched for. I wanted to create a movement which could take hold and enact change. Our Sunrise Intersectional Justice model demonstrates synergy and connection, representing the main areas where there are inequalities and injustices which feed human trafficking and modern slavery. They are the issues we will act to connect with human trafficking and will address collectively to bring justice to. We speak with amplified voices, calling out to youth who stand with us, to reimagine the world where youth are not deceived into exploitation, where women don't fall from windows in desperation, where people are not coerced into selling their bodies. If we are united, this imaginary world of justice could actually become our reality.



**INCLUSION  
AND DECISION MAKING  
FOR DISABLED  
YOUTH**

**SYLVAIN  
OBEDI**

**My name is Sylvain Obedi and I live in Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). I am an advocate for gender equality, the rights of people with disabilities, and co-founder of Enable The Disable Action (EDA). My colleagues and I founded EDA to promote and protect the human rights and socio-economic situations of people with disabilities and vulnerable local communities. Our goal is to improve vulnerable and disabled people's living conditions for a better future in the DRC. I am also a proud member of the Generation Equality Youth Task Force (GEF YTF).**

**I say I am a proud member of the GEF YTF because it is a space where we recognize every member for their true worth. I wish this was the norm but it is not. Even in spaces that are created with the goal of achieving equality I find that my voice as a person living with a disability is often unheard or pushed to the side. There is a long history of activist spaces excluding people living with disabilities and other marginalized groups. However in the GEF YTF I am completely included and my voice counts in every decision the group makes.**

**As the name Generation Equality Youth Task Force indicates, I can affirmatively and unequivocally say that in this group, marginalized people—including disabled people—are the main focus. This, I believe, is one solution to addressing problems of discrimination. For the eight months that I have been part of this group, not one moment has gone by that wasn't pure joy. The Youth Task Force has been, for me, a tight-knit family ready to do anything to see me succeed and live a rewarding and happy life. We use an all-inclusive and intersectional approach to our work, understanding that our struggles are connected.**

**It was in this group that I had an opportunity to experiment with theories of social work and the social contract laid out by John Locke in his book Two Treatises of Government. We uphold the idea that every person is born with the same rights, which can never be taken or given away. Our group is proof that it's possible to adopt a concept, in an inclusive way, that is based on collective aspirations and experiences. To take this concept, work with it and arrive at a comprehensive outcome with ideas drawn from every field.**

**As a young leader, and now as a Youth Task Force representative in the main group on the path to the Paris Forum, I believe that young people have vital experiences to share and must be included in the processes of decision-making. The participatory energy that we bring is vital to the outcome of change-making processes. We have a right to the global legitimacy of multi-actor processes operated by governments and multilateral institutions.**

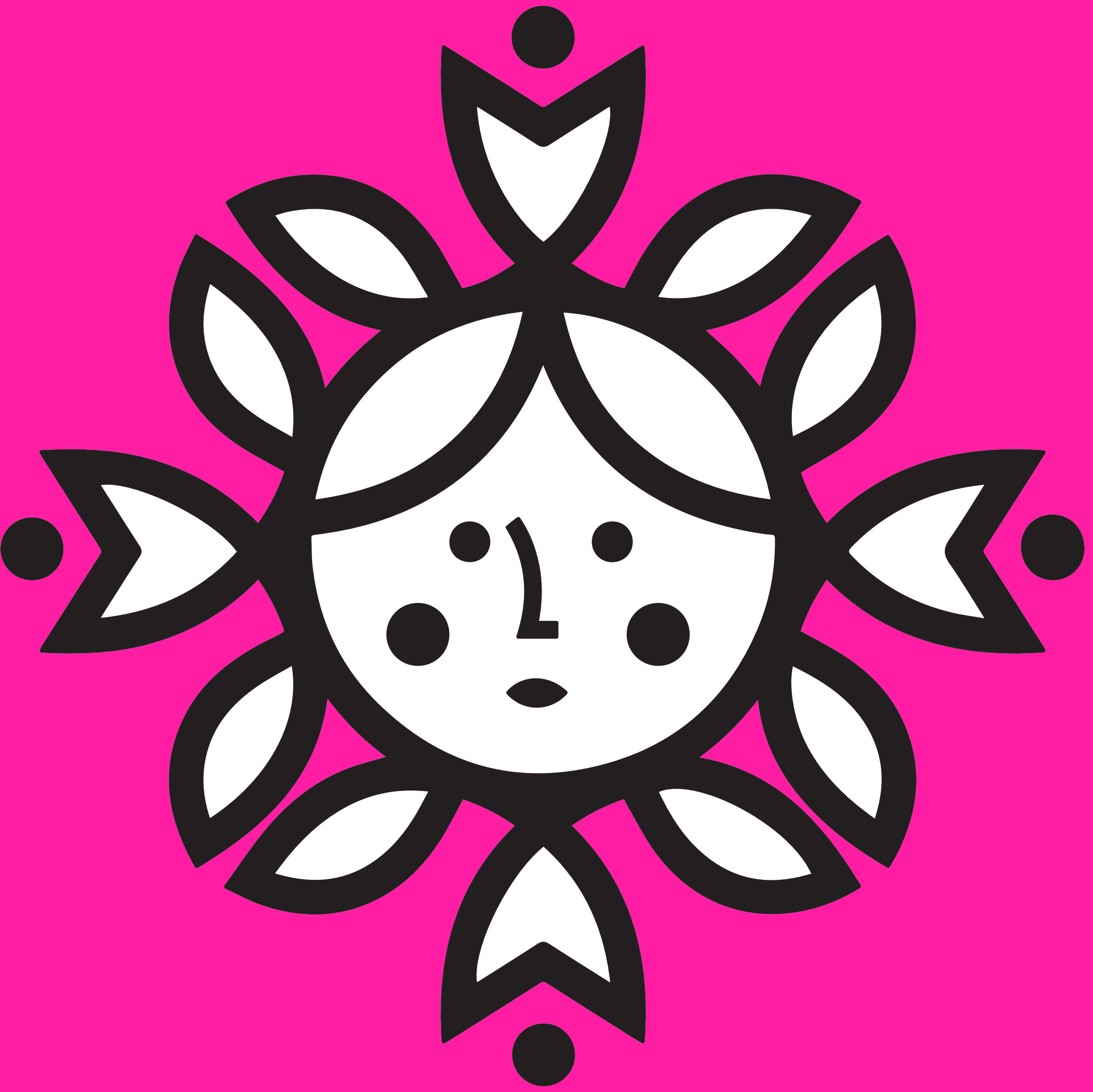
**I hope a high priority is being placed in the Generation Equality process on ensuring that the involvement of young people is**



not symbolic or restricted to limited, insignificant roles based only on statements of intention. I hope that the roles of young people include decision-making, leadership, strategy design, and co-ownership in developing and shaping Generation Equality with a view to turning descriptive representation into substantive representation for youth.

So no one falls through the cracks in this process, I call for the inclusion of a person living with disabilities to be present with a decision-making role in every Action Coalition of the GEF. Active inclusion of disabled people, and young people are the keys to this Forum's success.

**THERE IS NO NIGHT THAT  
DOESN'T DAWN**



**İLAYDA ESKITAŞÇIOĞLU**

## *Kirli [Kear · lee]*

*Kirli* means “dirty, filthy, unclean” in Turkish. According to the dictionary of the Turkish Language Institute, another definition for “kirli” is “a woman who’s menstruating.” When I learned about this absurd and misogynistic pairing back in 2013, a light bulb went on in my brain. I remembered the big earthquake that happened in my hometown of Van back in 2011 and how my matriarchal family completely forgot to put sanitary pads or tampons into aid boxes that were sent to the disaster zone. Not a single one of us had thought of it. How bizarre. We were taught to not think of it, not to talk about it and to go through a very normal biological experience quietly, in the dark.

After some research, as I was graduating from law school, I finally decided to do something about it and founded We Need to Talk, an NGO based in Turkey that fights against period poverty and menstrual stigma. Period poverty is a global problem that is affecting marginalized menstruators. It can simply be defined as the lack of access to or the inability to afford hygienic and safe menstrual products such as pads and tampons. While fighting period poverty, we target three vulnerable groups: seasonal agricultural workers, the Syrian refugee community, and children who are going to school in remote rural areas. Through donations and sponsorships, we provide young women and girls with enough menstrual products to last a harvest season or a semester. We inform them about menstruation through our volunteer doctors, have Q&A sessions, and, most importantly, we build a safe environment to talk about menstruation. That is why I named our movement “We Need to Talk”; destroying the stigma around menstruation is the first step in eradicating period poverty and empowering women in their reproductive health.

Today, I have my partner and co-manager Bahar and a family of young passionate feminist women volunteers breaking the taboo with me. There have been times when we were accused of being immoral and wicked, sure, and there were times when we had to secretly distribute sanitary pads in black bags around conservative neighborhoods. There were others in which we changed mindsets through open, honest conversations about menstruation. We have influenced parents to promise to break the cycle of silence and inspired MPs to submit legislative proposals to Parliament. Through long hours of momentum-building we have personally reached out to more than 20,000 beneficiaries who are supporting their families, working and studying hard under very harsh conditions. And through our digital content, we have reached many more. Access to menstrual products is not only about hygiene, but also about dignity. And we believe everyone deserves dignity. This long overdue conversation has begun in Turkey and the Middle East, and we are just getting started.

We Need to Talk is only one initiative that I’m proud to represent. Being a member of the Generation Equality Youth Task Force, and



meeting amazing, passionate youth activists from all around the world, is another source of pride for me. We, as the Youth Task Force, are bringing young people's perspectives to the table, to build an intergenerational solidarity in our fight for gender equality and to raise our voice on platforms which have lacked young voices for so long. We are notoriously persistent (I would also say stubborn), but we are so happy to see that Generation Equality is witnessing a systemic transformation. It is a slow transformation, but it is happening before our eyes.

Let me give an example: Our Youth Task Force has built a strong case to gain a seat at the Core Group of the Generation Equality Forum for youth representatives. It took a while to convince all stakeholders, and we had to prove ourselves to earn a seat at the table. When we finally succeeded, we felt proud, but we also felt tired. Ultimately, we felt deserving. We had a wonderful kickstart in Mexico City, and we are looking forward to Paris, proud to be representing youth. I don't know how many international gatherings at the scale of Generation Equality Forum have a voting seat for youth representatives, but I hope we have set a precedent.

I was, and still am, amazed at how similar the Youth Task Force's collective journey was to my personal one. There have been bumps in the road, but the power of solidarity and the journey was so worth it. There were times in which we felt tokenized or felt we weren't heard, so we decided to gather our collective experiences and create the Young Feminist Manifesto. It was the product of many youth activists' collective hard work and it was genuinely welcomed by not only fellow youth activists but also other stakeholders of the Generation Equality process. Tough experiences have turned into a valuable record, a collective story. Is it representative of every young voice around the world? Of course not. We always remind ourselves of the empty chairs at the table—those who are not online, those who are caught in armed conflicts, those who cannot afford activism work.

Intersectionality is at the core of our collective efforts and something we constantly check ourselves to be mindful of. Intersectionality is not only about identity and lived experience but also about the fight we put out and the ways in which we combat inequality. As a period poverty activist, I know that this is an issue of sexual and reproductive rights and health, but also of poverty, of gender equality, and of taboo culture. Generation Equality is about representation and intergenerational solidarity. Internalizing those intersections has been one of my biggest takeaways from this long, crazy journey. I am proud of what we have achieved so far, yet there is so much to be done. As a Millennial, I am looking at the amazing work of Generation Z and I feel hopeful. We have Generation Alpha coming up next, and I am hoping with all my heart that they will be the generation that can fully experience an equal future. We will keep working hard for it, and keep hoping. As my grandma liked to say, there is no night that doesn't dawn.

**IDENTIFYING AS A  
YOUNG FEMINIST  
IN AFRICA:  
FEMINIST ORGANIZING  
IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH**

**ANIKA JANE DOROTHY**





As a young woman in Kenya, the journey to publicly identify as a feminist has been a long and tumultuous one. It has been one of self-doubt, misconceptions and misunderstanding. It has been one of loss of identity and displacement in society. The African society embraced the tenets of gender equality in the early 70's as we ushered in the first conference on women in Mexico City; but this was reserved for the public spaces - the professional and career spaces. Women were often chastised for bringing their careers and titles to their private spaces (their homes). This forced separation then became a large part of counselling sessions by great aunties and religious pastors for young women about to get married. The art of submission and servitude are indoctrinated into young women from the onset of their lives. But you see, as time went by we learnt more and more about gender equality, gender mainstreaming and the rights of women, as Hillary Rodham Clinton auspiciously sang in Beijing that "women's rights are human rights." In many African households it became a pride of fathers to see their daughters succeed in school and their professional lives. These women often found an identity crisis as they got older. The cheerleaders of their success who said 'Beat all the boys in class' now changed their tune and said, 'Ah calm down, don't show him your brightness'. Parents had successfully brought up the girl in empowerment and agency, but maintained the boy child in the mightiness of patriarchy within the same household. How does this relate to gender equality in the long run? How does it affect the economy? How does the culture of patriarchy and male dominance contribute to our overall lagging in achieving gender equality?

When you grow up knowing, believing and being taught that one gender is superior to yours in intellect, capability, decision-making and most importantly in speech & representation, then you develop a culture of silence. You stifle your voice. You develop a culture of self-doubt even when you are sure that you are correct. When young women do not feel like they have a voice, enough to be heard, listened to or respected, they stay silent. They stay silent in class, affecting their overall knowledge gaps; when having their first sexual encounter, which they really do not understand but cannot question and that is interpreted as consent; they stay silent in business deals, they stay silent when passed over for promotions and when not accorded equal pay or equal treatment, they stay silent when abused - the list is endless.

The objectification of the modern respectful African woman who is an epitome of success in both her public and private spaces is an undue burden on the African young woman. This is why it is so important for us to have young African feminist voices in the Generation Equality process. We need to tell the story from the African perspective and tell the world what we want, what we need, and how to help us get there. The world may be in the year 2021, but it sure does feel like 1995 in Africa, especially in the face of a pandemic; where the gains of women painstakingly achieved over the years have been eroded within a year. With the



safe haven that schools provided no longer in operation millions of girls will never go back to school as they have been married off, experienced teenage pregnancy or simply lost all hope of acquiring an education.

The Africa Young Women's Manifesto is a political document that sets out critical issues of concern for young women of Africa and makes demands for addressing them. The Manifesto is the result of five Africa Young Women Beijing+25 Regional Barazas that convened over 1500 participants and over 30 partners with the objectives of FEM: Through the African Young Women Manifesto, young women of Africa seek to FOSTER intergenerational co-leadership and dialogues; ENABLE young women in the different regions to share their initiatives and engagement at grassroots, national, regional and continental level; and MOBILIZE for the Africa Young Women Manifesto with 10 practical demands with special focus on 3 that affect our lives wholesomely.

**Our 10 Demands are:**

**Demand 1 - Economic Justice;** in the context of COVID-19, but also encompasses empowerment, and tackles areas that are still not duly explored, such as unpaid care work, unpaid young women's work, and grassroots funding for African women organizations;

**Demand 2 - Criminalize Gender Based Violence;** Fund allocation in support of youth innovation and research to tackle Gender Based Violence. Society must be free from Gender Based Violence;

**Demand 3 - End Gender Discriminatory Demand;** Introduction of legislative measures that eliminate all forms of discrimination against girls and young women based on their gender, marital status, skin colour, nationality and heritage, or age in order to ensure their human rights and fundamental freedoms;

**Demand 4- Access to Justice & Protection;** Revision, amendment or repeal of legislations that discriminate against young women to ensure equality before the law and fair access to justice. This includes, but is not limited to the protection of young women's rights especially in times of armed conflict, natural disasters and displacement. It is the responsibility of the international community to tackle the root causes of these conflicts that so gravely affect vulnerable young women;

**Demand 5 - Sexual and Reproductive Health & Rights;** Provision of universal access to essential sexual and reproductive health rights and services, particularly those in rural areas, including counselling for young women on their sexual and reproductive freedom. Our reproductive health is not an embarrassment, a distraction, or a reason to discriminate;

**Demand 6 - Mental Health & Well-Being;** Provision of mental health services that understand the impact of daily sexism, misogyny and discrimination resulting in severe challenges affecting the mental health of young women;

**Demand 7 - Education;** Increase of national budget allocations for education (and decrease that of militarization) to accelerate the development of e-learning systems in delivering quality

**inclusive, equitable and free, preprimary, primary, secondary and tertiary education especially for young women and girls offline in remote areas Demand 8 - Digital Justice Demand; Acceleration of digital transformation, particularly for rural and vulnerable young women, including accessible, affordable and reliable broadband internet, as well as investment in digital infrastructures and technologies that facilitate the digital economy and opportunities for young women;**

**Demand 9 - Intergenerational Co-Leadership; A tailored demand that encompasses Action Coalition thematic areas, as well as being reflective of the leadership status in the continent;**

**Demand 10 - Silencing the Guns; Protection of the rights of young women and accountability during armed conflict, occupation of territories, natural disasters and humanitarian emergencies. We, as young women, do not produce, sell or buy guns, why do we have to pay the price of warlords?**

**These demands give us a voice. In both our public and private spaces. They allow us to humanize our statistics with lifesaving interventions and commitments from Action Coalitions leaders. We do not demand a new dawn. We just demand the right to exist in the dignity of our own human rights, accorded the necessary support and respect for what we have to say about how our lives should be. We are Generation Equality.**

**Sign up and support the demands of African Young Women here and follow The Nala Collective to track our progress and contribute to our overall goal.**

**ZAHRA AL HILALY**

**I AM  
BECAUSE  
WE  
ARE**



The depths of the words that leave my tongue resonate deeper than the echo that bounces within the room in which I speak them. My voice is a recollection of the women that have come before me: my grandmothers, my aunties, my cousins, my mother and my sisters, all of whom are the reason I am. I am because we are.

From my very birth, as a Muslim woman with a migrant and refugee background living within Australia, the memory of feeling unwelcomed within a country that was neither mine nor my relatives was profound.

The trials of being a woman with an intersectional identity in Australia are unending. I have battled with my presence on multiple occasions, trying to balance the identities I hold: Muslim, woman of color, immigrant. It was my very existence which condemned me to the vilification that I would receive in my teen and adult years. I was continuously reminded that my presence was a paradox that only I could decipher.

This was only made worse in the wake of 9/11 when there was a huge surge of Islamophobia and xenophobia in the world and Australia. I experienced multiple forms of hate. Having my hijab pulled off was the start of it; being physically assaulted was not the end of it. To this day I do not know when things will get better and I do not know when or if my identity will be accepted in this country that is not my own. I do know that my strength is unwavering, a beacon of light that guides me. The strength I have derives from the women in my life.

It is the voices of my grandmothers in Palestine who unwaveringly fought for their land and never gave up, even when their homes were possessed. It is my aunties who travelled by boat in search of a land that could give them hope, but never home—migrating to a country that could never be their own. It is my mother, who travelled to a new country, alone, with ten dollars in her pocket, hoping to build a life for her daughters, a life that would transcend the boundaries she never thought she could. It is my sisters, across the world, who fight for our liberation and freedom to never integrate, but to recreate.

Projecting this strength back into my heart is the very reason why my existence no longer depends on the way that others view me. I am emboldened by carrying on the legacy that my sisters and ancestors have fought for across the world.

As a woman with a migrant and refugee background living within Australia, this country will never be mine; but I now know that my home belongs within the sisterhood for change.

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youth from becoming victims and to ensure everyone learns about these crimes. Sylvain Obedi is an activist for the rights of people with disabilities, a national advocate for gender equality, co-founder of Enable the Disable Action (EDA), and member of the Generation Equality Youth Task Force (GEYTF). He holds an international certificate in public policy and leadership from the ITC University U.S. Foundation and a Bachelor's degree in domestic and international public law from the Peace University of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (UNIP-RDC). Currently, he is the Assistant Coordinator for the Young African Leaders Initiative (YALI RDC) network in North Kivu province in the east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and a member of the Commonwealth Children and Youth Disability Network (CCYDN), a global network of disabled children and youth. He is an independent consultant on matters of human rights, social and gender inclusion, and the involvement of young people in decision-making groups.

İlayda Eskitaşcioğlu is a human rights lawyer and a PhD student at Koç University in İstanbul, Turkey. She is an attorney at Ankara Bar Association, and currently a fellow at the Koç University UNESCO Chair for Gender Equality and Sustainable Development. She founded We Need to Talk in 2016, an NGO which fights against period poverty and menstruation stigma in Turkey. She was selected as one of Turkey's Changemakers in 2020, as a member of the Generation Equality Youth Task Force led by UN Women, and most recently as one of the 17 Young Leaders for Sustainable Development Goals, endorsed by the United Nations.

Anika Jane Dorothy is the East Africa Co-ordinator for AMPLIFY GIRLS and convener of Young women in Political Parties Leadership. She garnered vast experience working with grassroots community environmental organizations which consisted primarily of women and girls. Ms. Anika is part of the 40 global youth of the Generation Equality Global Youth Task Force by UN Women and the current Youth Core Group Representative in the Generation Equality Forum. She is also part of AWLN (African Women Leadership Network) technical committee in Kenya. Lastly, she is a ONE East Africa Champion where she lobbies decision makers in effort to create changes needed for gender equality. Ms. Anika holds a Masters in Women, Leadership & Governance in Africa from the University of Nairobi.

Zahra Al Hilaly is an intersectional feminist, pushing for equitable representation within decision-making for marginalized constituencies, including women of colour and migrant and refugee women. Zahra works within policy and advocacy at an Australian local, national and international level. She currently represents Australia on UN Women's Generation Equality Youth Task Force, is a part of the World YWCA Women's Leadership Cohort, and sits on multiple advisory boards and round tables including the YWCA Australia Young Women's Council and the Western Australia Ministerial Council.

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