

The Honorable António Guterres

United Nations Secretary-General
United Nations Headquarters
New York, NY 10017

September 30, 2025

Your Excellency,

On behalf of the NGO Committee on the Status of Women Geneva, a network of 33 international NGOs present on every continent and representing tens of thousands, we are writing to you with deep concern regarding current discussions about merging UN Women with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). Such a merger would undermine the independence of UN Women, weaken its mandate, and erode decades of progress in advancing the rights of women and girls worldwide.

As you know, during the United Nations reform discussions of the 2000s, agreement was reached on the three core pillars of the UN's work and yet women were not mentioned at all. Civil society strongly advocated for a unified body dedicated to all women and girls, and it was through this advocacy that UN Women was ultimately created.

UN Women was established to fill a unique gap within the United Nations system. It is the only entity with the explicit mandate and institutional capacity to monitor, defend, and advance gender equality. Its autonomy allows it to identify when financial mechanisms, policy reversals, or administrative restructuring place all women's and girl's rights at risk. Absorbing UN Women into a broader health-focused agency would erase this role entirely, leaving the UN without a dedicated voice to recognize and resist these threats.

This proposal comes at a time when all women and girls are facing unprecedented global pushback. Around the world, reproductive rights are being rolled back, funding for gender equality is being cut, women and girls are being excluded from peace processes, and cultural narratives are being weaponized to undermine women's advancement. In this environment, weakening UN Women would embolden those who seek to limit women's rights, precisely when the UN must stand firm in defending them.

The truth is clear: the struggle for gender equality is far from complete. Entrenched discrimination, barriers to women's participation in the workforce, and systemic exclusion from decision-making persist across societies. UN Women has been instrumental in confronting these injustices and ensuring that all women's and girls' voices remain central to development, peacebuilding, and justice. To weaken it now would be a profound step backward.

If the United Nations is committed to reform, the path forward must be one of strengthening UN Women. This means safeguarding its independence, expanding its resources, and reinforcing its ability to act decisively in contexts of inequality, crisis, and conflict. A strong and autonomous UN Women is not only essential for achieving gender equality but is also a cornerstone of peacebuilding, disaster risk reduction, and sustainable development.

We therefore respectfully urge the United Nations to:

1. Maintain UN Women as an autonomous body within the United Nations system.
2. Strengthen its mandate and increase its resources.
3. Reaffirm its central role in advancing the rights, participation, and empowerment of all women and girls globally.

Civil society and women's movements are united in defending UN Women's autonomy. We will not remain silent, and we will continue to mobilize to ensure that gender equality remains at the core of the United Nations' mission.

Women and girls make up half of humanity and yet still we find there is no place on earth where there is equality. If we want a world where all enjoy peace and prosperity and where we have sustainable and reciprocal environments, the world needs equality. To lose the United Nations entity designed to champion equality of women and men, girls and boys will be a disaster for humanity and our earth.

Yours respectfully,



Carolyn Handschin-Moser (WFWPI)
President, NGO CSW Geneva



Berthe De Vos-Neven (SI)
Vice President, NGO CSW Geneva



Brigitte Polonovski (ICW)
Vice President, NGO CSW Geneva



Zarin Hainsworth (WRI)
Vice President, NGO CSW Geneva
