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International Women's Day

The Charter - another way to "march"

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This document accompanies the Women's Global Charter for Humanity. It explains why women of the World March of Women felt the need to draft a new instrument that reflects our feminist vision of the world we want to build.

It also contains a series of denunciations of the world in which we live, drawing on the 17 demands of the World March of Women.

The Women's Global Charter for Humanity was adopted on December 10, 2004, in Kigali, Rwanda, by the majority of delegates attending the 5th International Meeting of the World March of Women. It reflects the diverse character of the women's groups composing the World March of Women. It contains a series of affirmations these groups agree are essential conditions for the construction of a world founded on equality, freedom, solidarity, justice and peace.

The Charter's content may not be amended, unlike this supporting document, which each group is free to use according to its needs.

1. Why a Women's Global Charter for Humanity?

The Women's Global Charter for Humanity is an initiative of the World March of Women. The March encourages numerous groups that, while not yet members, defend the same values and are acting to transform the world in which we live, to join our movement.

The Women's Global Charter for Humanity describes the world that women of the World March of Women are in the process of building. It follows in the wake of actions led by countless women over history who have fought oppression, inequality, exploitation and discrimination.

With this Charter, women of the World March of Women are carrying on the actions we began in 1998 to eliminate poverty and violence against women around the globe. The conditions necessary to reach these goals are expressed in the 17 demands adopted by the March (revisited in 2001). They have been circulated in 163 countries and territories by the roughly 6000 groups that participate in the World March of Women. As a proposal for another world, the Charter is another way to carry on the March.

2. What Distinguishes the Charter from Other Similar Documents

Many international instruments enshrine human rights, in particular women's rights. These include: the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the Convention on the Employment of Women Before and After Childbirth, the Convention on the Political Rights of Women, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the women's rights Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women (Belém do Pará), and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

These documents do not, however, question the roots of exploitation and oppression. They do not denounce capitalism and patriarchy. They do not ensure the construction of a new social project that will guarantee the planet's

survival ecologically, economically, politically, socially and culturally.

This is why we need a Charter that offers a radical critique of the causes of this oppression, exploitation, violence and destruction.

3. Women denounce

Women are not men's equals when it comes to access to wealth, land, the means of production, goods, education, occupational training, health, housing, food, employment and technology. Nor are they equal regarding issues like pay, safety, rights protection, social protection, information, recognition of their human dignity, and the choice of a partner. Numerous girls and women are married and remarried against their will and at an extremely young age. Many women do not have the right to travel freely, possess identity papers, exercise control over their reproductive health, express an opinion, take legal action, inherit, or take part in public and political life. They are targets for violence, subjected to genital mutilation, victims of "honour crimes," rape, acid attacks, and burned just for being women, and often they have no redress or means to counter this violence.

One of the main foundations of patriarchy and capitalism is the existence of a malleable, underpaid female workforce that is often obliged to endure slavery-like conditions. These systems are also rooted in the assurance that women will do the essential work of social reproduction like educating children, caring for intimates, subsistence agriculture, housework, cooking, maintaining clothes, etc., for free.

For many generations now, women have denounced the patriarchal system that assigns them inferior status in society, where they are dominated, excluded, marginalized and treated as an object rather than a person.

Women also denounce capitalism, which oppresses the majority of women and men in the world, and racism, which generates intolerable inequality. Economic and market globalization accentuate existing inequalities. Humanity does not lack for resources or wealth production; rather, we are suffering a serious problem of universal access, responsible management and equitable distribution of these resources and wealth. While a handful of speculators and businessmen around the world become ever richer, the number of the poor and excluded with no access to goods and services essential to the exercise of their human rights, steadily rises.

This is why women of the World March of Women denounce:

1. Transnational corporations, giant landowners, banks and financial power holders whose sole objective is to become richer. Through their speculation and continuous quest to increase production and consumption, they wreak destruction on local organizations, small entrepreneurs and small commercial and rural enterprises. They impose difficult working conditions, trample social and union rights, and exploit adults and children; women are over-represented in these worker categories. Their policy destroys the balance between humans and the earth and results in the depletion of natural resources, an energy crisis and environmental destruction.
2. International financial organizations' (World Bank and the International Monetary Fund) imposition on poor countries of structural adjustment programs and other measures that result in cuts to public services, spiralling debt and relentless impoverishment.
3. The impoverishment of countries, leading to the development of mafias that exploit people and force them to work in despicable, inhuman conditions as extreme as slavery, prostitution and sex trafficking. Millions of women are recruited in this way into networks rife with violence.
4. Wars and armed conflict that profit the arms industry, decimate civilian populations, breed impoverishment and injury, and generate hate and terrorism. Women and children form the majority of the victims: sexual violence, forced abortion and sterilization, forcible recruitment into armies or militias, forced displacements etc. The consequences on their physical and mental health are acute (HIV, AIDS, sexually transmitted diseases,

numerous and long-lasting injuries).

5. All forms of violence against women. This violence is physical and psychological in form. It exists everywhere on the planet: in intimate relationships, the family, school, the workplace, in public, etc. Violence against women is devastating and can cause mutilation and death.
6. Men who refuse to renounce their privilege, exercising control and power over women in private and public.
7. All forms of religious fundamentalism, which prevents women from exercising freedom and full control of their bodies and sexuality and making decisions about their lives. This is a dangerous development of intolerance in the face of diverse opinions and forms of cultural, sexual and religious expression.
8. Governments and parliaments of States, to the extent that they abandon their responsibilities to women and men citizens and when they take the form of authoritarian regimes and dictatorships.
9. The scandalous institutionalized corruption in which wealth is hidden in tax havens and banking secrecy, constituting legalized theft.
10. The UN's inability to establish egalitarian and peaceful relationships between countries and peoples and to promote viable development. It suffers from a lack of financial and political resources. The structure of the Security Council-where five rich countries have the right to veto-undermines its proper functioning and often results in unjust decisions.

4. Women are building

The world women want to build is a world based on the rule of law and democracy.

A democracy should serve all women and men living in the territory covered by the State. In this State, women and men citizens enjoy genuine political equality, participate in collective decisions and exercise a true degree of control over how such collective choices will be implemented.

A State subject to the rule of law should represent everyone's interests. It is responsible for ensuring that each member of society has genuine, equal and free access to services like education and health care and has decent housing and nutritious food. It institutes specific measures to improve the status of the most marginalized, discriminated against and poorest members of society. It works to ensure collective security, social cohesion, equality and solidarity.

In this State women and men citizens are free and autonomous and as such are responsible for their actions as individuals, as families, as a couple and as members of society. Living together implies complying with the rules a society collectively formulates, to the extent that such rules protect the well-being of all. This is also true of international relations, where all peoples should be able to independently determine their own destiny.

In this society, women are full citizens, holding their own identity papers. If they so choose they have the right to use their own name; choose their nationality; and transmit it to their children, whatever their social or civil status or country of birth-and this, in the respect of every individual and the rules collectively determined by the society

The Charter repeatedly declares that only a society that is viable in the long term and that respects the environment and natural resources is capable of ensuring the well-being of its inhabitants today and in the future. In this respect, many groups refer to their opposition to the use of genetically modified organisms in agriculture and fish-farming, and to the introduction of other elements into the food chain. We nevertheless support the use of controlled genetic manipulation in the service of human beings, especially women, with a view to improving health and treating genetically-based illnesses.

The Charter does not describe how to build this new world. It is a sketch of our utopia. It is being constructed now,

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and has been for a long time, in every struggle to change this world and in every corner of the planet. The Charter serves as a reference point. It is up to each of us to take it and use it where we live.