

COLUMN

**At the UN, States cannot
remain silent on women's
rights and gender equality.**



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FOLLOWING THE G7 SUMMIT, MEMBER STATES MUST BREAK THEIR SILENCE AND STRONGLY ADVOCATE FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND GENDER EQUALITY AT THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY.

Starting September 8, the member states of the United Nations (UN) will meet in New York for the 81st session of the General Assembly. This annual gathering, which allows member states to debate key international issues and take the pulse of diplomatic dynamics, comes at a pivotal moment. Around the world, the rights of girls, adolescent girls, women, and LGBTQIA+ people are facing unprecedented challenges, particularly under pressure from masculinists, far-right, and populist movements. The very principle of gender equality is under attack on a massive scale, despite the adoption of feminist foreign policy by several countries.

This setback is neither spontaneous nor isolated. It stems from an organized, coordinated, and largely funded political offensive against gender equality, international human rights standards, and multilateralism itself. This backlash is impacting international negotiations, budgetary priorities, and political decisions, including within the UN.

In the face of these setbacks, the Women 7 and the coalitions who signed this op-ed are launching an appeal: the United Nations General Assembly cannot reproduce the compromises observed at the G7. It must be a forum where States openly protect and promote international commitments in favor of gender equality.

THE G7'S CONCESSIONS: A WARNING SIGN

The conclusions¹ adopted at the G7 summit in Évian illustrate this backlash. Of the nine texts adopted, only two mention the rights of women and girls, and only in connection with economic and digital issues. Sexual and reproductive rights, gender-based economic justice, food security, girls' access to education, and the gendered impact of climate change were ignored and absent from the declarations, even though these topics are essential for sustainable development and a peaceful world.

Giving in to countries that are openly anti-rights and anti-choice, in the context of shrinking civic space and drastic cuts in funding for feminist organizations, amounts not only to excluding gender equality from commitments, but also to endorsing the regressions taking place before our eyes.

¹ [Leaders declaration on mutually beneficial international partnerships, \(16 juin 2026\) - G7 France](#)

THE EVIAN SUMMIT IS OVER, SILENCE IS NO LONGER AN OPTION

The G7 is a forum that has always been subject to debate. This year's configuration was all the more complex, divided between member states that fuel the backlash, others that turn a blind eye, and still others that demonstrate a willingness to combat it. With the summit over, we must now turn the tide and redouble our efforts to defend women's rights and gender equality in other multilateral forums. The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) is the largest UN gathering. It is an opportunity to seek allies and marginalize the most reactionary states. This is a crucial multilateral moment and a time for states to affirm their support for feminist organizations, which raise awareness and take action against the erosion of rights and against all forms of violence and discrimination.

THE UN80 INITIATIVE: A REFORM THAT COULD WEAKEN THE RIGHTS IT CLAIMS TO PROTECT

This year, the UN General Assembly is taking place in a unique context. Due to drastic cuts in official development assistance worldwide and the withdrawal of some member states, the United Nations has embarked on a major internal restructuring and reform process, known as UN80. At first glance, this announcement is positive: finally, states are recognizing the need for reform. However, areas of uncertainty remain. Feminist organizations, which were not consulted, are raising concerns about the proposed merger of two UN agencies: the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), specializing in sexual and reproductive health and rights, and UN Women, responsible for gender equality. If unwell planned, this merger could have serious consequences: disruption - or even elimination - of programs; a reduction in the quantity, diversity, and quality of actions undertaken; a dilution of the two mandates; and ultimately, a decrease in funding allocated to both sexual and reproductive health and gender equality. In concrete terms, this risks causing interruptions in essential care services overnight and weakening access to contraception and abortion, violence prevention and the fight against HIV/AIDS... For feminist organizations, it is precisely when rights are under attack that the institutions that defend them must be strengthened.

THE FUTURE OF MULTILATERALISM MUST BE BUILT WITH FEMINIST ASSOCIATIONS.

At the current rate, according to UN Women estimates, it would take another 300 years to achieve gender equality.²

² [Près de 300 ans avant d'atteindre l'égalité de genre : ONU Femmes France appelle à revoir nos priorités L \(16 mars 2023\) - ONU Femmes France](#)

Our societies can no longer wait. Thousands of organizations signing this open letter call on the States meeting in New York in September for the 81st United Nations General Assembly to explicitly recognize that the backlash, this systematic attack on the rights of women, girls and LGBTQIA+ people, is a danger to human rights, democracies and multilateralism.

The ongoing restructuring at the United Nations also raises a deeper question: what model of multilateralism do we want? For our feminist coalitions, the approach is clear: a resolutely egalitarian model; anti-colonial and anti-racist, in favor of all people and the planet. We want a strong multilateralism that firmly opposes backlash, fights climate change and injustice everywhere, mobilizes in the face of crises, and does not resolve conflicts. A multilateralism that denounces and addresses structural and systemic inequalities through egalitarian global governance and renewed financial commitment from states to international solidarity and gender equality policies. A renewed multilateralism that recognizes the importance of civil society organizations as a democratic bulwark and guarantees and facilitates their full participation in its institutions.

SIGNATAIRES

- **The Women 7 (W7)** is a coalition of more than 260 feminist organizations from 62 countries, coordinated by Equipop, CARE France, the Mediterranean Women's Fund, the Family Planning Association and Plan International France.
- **The Women's Rights Caucus (WRC)** is a global intersectional feminist coalition of more than 800 organizations, networks, and individuals convened by Fòs Feminista, Outright International, African Women's Development and Communications Network (FEMNET), Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD), and Young Feminist Caucus, that advocates for gender equality at the UN.
- Mobilizing since 2025, the **Feminist Cross-Coalition UN80 Working Group** brings together over 1,000 organizations worldwide organizing to protect the UN's gender equality architecture through the UN80 reform process.
- The **Francophone Feminist Alliance** is a collective initiative that aims to strengthen the participation and influencing capacity of francophone feminists in multilateral spaces. Through networking activists and collective advocacy in institutional spaces, the Alliance helps make visible and structure a shared francophone feminist advocacy agenda for gender equality.
- **The Women's Major Group (WMG)** is a global network of over 2,000 feminist and women's rights organizations working to advance gender, economic, social, and environmental justice in the United Nations Sustainable Development processes.

Contacts - Organizing Committee Women 7 2026

- **Lucie Daniel** for Equipop – lucie.daniel@equipop.org – +33 (0)6 76 83 44 84
- **Laura Audouard** for Plan International France – laura.audouard@plan-international.org
- **Jeanne Lacou** for CARE France – lacou@carefrance.org
- **Noémie Gardais** for Planning Familial – noemie.gardais@planning-familial.org
- **Fawzia Baba-Aissa** for the Mediterranean Women's Fund – fbaba@medwomensfund.org

Press contacts

- Camille Frouin – +33 (0)6 25 83 95 23 – camille.frouin@equipop.org
- Lola Ruscio – +33 (0)7 86 45 12 10 – Lola.Ruscio@plan-international.org
- Laurence Bondard – +33 (0)7 86 00 42 75 – Bondard@carefrance.org

