

## **Soroptimist International Statement: The Rights of Women and Girls November 2022**

As the protests across Iran continue in response to the death of the young woman, Mahsa Amini, Soroptimist International is deeply concerned that this is just one example of the human rights of women and girls being suppressed in many countries across the globe. Soroptimist International rigorously opposes such violations of human rights and calls on the Iranian Government and all other Governments to cease state-controlled violence against unarmed women and girls immediately, and to comply with international laws protecting the right to freedom of expression and elimination of gender discrimination.

In spite of the existence and recognition of the [Beijing Platform for Action](#) and [UN Sustainable Development Goal 5](#) (Gender Equality), in recent years, women and girls have found their human rights being eroded, their voices of protest suppressed, and in some cases, brutally silenced. Human rights protesters, activists and defenders have been subjected to assault, other forms of violence and in some cases alleged torture. Civil society organisations including those providing humanitarian aid are being squeezed out or forcibly removed from many geographical areas. Some but not all of these are areas of armed conflict.

Many of the countries committing oppressive acts have signed on to international conventions and treaties, which should give recognition and protection to women and children. Regrettably, in an increasing number of countries' Governments are ignoring those international laws and agreements which they have previously committed to, including the [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#). This has led to and is continuing to remove areas of freedom of expression, whether individually or collectively, from women and girls, often in the most marginalised communities and vulnerable positions.

Removal of access to education, social protection, various aspects of health care, recognition of legal rights which have previously ensured that women and girls can contribute to their communities and the development of their countries is unacceptable. To enforce this with aggression and violence cannot be tolerated.

Soroptimist International supported and signed the [NGO 2022 Open Letter to Permanent Representatives to the United Nations](#) in advance of the annual UN Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security. The letter cited examples of contraventions of international law and women's human rights in several countries including Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Syria, Myanmar, Sudan, Columbia, Palestine, and Yemen but there are many other examples of State violence against women and girls that can be identified.

There are also examples of repression of women and girls' human rights in other countries such as USA, UK, Russia, Poland, Guatemala, India, Turkey and others which have been identified by UN Special Rapporteurs.

Contraventions include the suppression of views in relation to sexual and reproductive health rights, particularly in relation to abortion and the aggressive silencing of voices raised in what is seen as opposition to Government imposition of laws contrary to the interests of women and girls, for example on dress or women's control over their own bodies. Prevention of the movement of refugees, many of whom are women and children are increasingly being enforced, often with violence. Many incidents have been reported in the international media and through social media, although often strenuously denied by the relevant Government.

Soroptimist International has worked for 100 years at local, national and international level to elevate the equality of women and girls, making progress especially in the areas of education and health. Soroptimist International is therefore horrified to find that in many parts of the world women and girls can no longer take their rightful place in their local communities. The work of many civil society organisations to support women and girls affected is not recognised and is often brutally rejected by authorities leaving the women isolated.

Sadly, across the world these challenges are too common. In many countries women and girls face significant human rights abuses; Soroptimist International has always worked to combat these human rights violations and will always stand up for women. Regardless of where these abuses happen, and who perpetrates or enables them, it is critical that these violations end immediately. We must unite to protect women and girls everywhere.

Soroptimist International and other Civil Society partners believe that freedom of speech is fundamental to the implementation of the UN Declaration of Human Rights and all the consequent resolutions and agreements with access to all parts of the media being fundamental to this.

This is not a political issue but a clear violation of women's rights as expressed through the UN Human Rights Commission and the Committee for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women. As a leading global advocate of gender equality, Soroptimist International has the responsibility to be the voice of those who have no power and no voice.

Soroptimist International, in sisterhood with other women's organisations demands that all Governments:

- implement the international agreements which enable a diversity of viewpoints to be heard and for representatives of civil society, especially women human rights protesters and defenders, to voice an opposing view to that of the State or the corporation.
- ratify relevant treaties and incorporate into national law protections for the implementation of gender equality and the elimination of violence against women and girls.
- cease any violent and aggressive actions taken against civilian protesters, especially women and children, immediately,
- take urgent action, through international mechanisms including the UN to address the continuing impunity for human rights violations wherever these take place, ensuring that independent investigations take place.