



To:

Ms Michelle Bachelet, High Commissioner of the OHCHR  
Mr Antonio Guterres, Secretary General of the United Nations  
Mr Coly Seck, President of the Human Rights Council

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Dear Ms Bachelet, Mr Gutierrez and Mr Seck:

We are deeply concerned by the financial shortfall facing the operations of your offices which has resulted in the postponement of the United Nations CEDAW session scheduled for the final quarter of 2019.<sup>1</sup> We also note that the shortfall has affected the ability of the CEDAW Committee to implement its mandate on the OPCEDAW.

This comes as a heavy blow in the wake of ongoing pushback against human rights around the world. We understand that cutbacks have occurred due in large part to delays by Member States in paying their contributions, and note that CEDAW is only one of six treaty bodies whose sessions have been postponed – all of which have a negative impact on women and women's rights organizations. We are deeply concerned both by this financial situation and its consequences on state accountability.

BeFree is a non-governmental organization based in Rome, Italy, that works to counter violence against women and human trafficking. We are also participants in the CEDAW platform, an umbrella coalition of Italy-based NGOs that regularly contributes to CEDAW's work.

In Italy and elsewhere, we are observing growing challenges to women's human rights. Ethno-nationalism and sexism are emboldened by the ascent of political parties that manipulate fear and build on social and cultural stereotypes that penalize women. The very existence of LGBTIQ people is in many places considered a threat to the fabric of society. We have recently seen the UN Security Council fail to pass a resolution which would uphold women's right to autonomy over their own bodies, even as survivors of sexual violence in conflict. The considerable efforts put into aligning the Sustainable Development Goals with human rights are rendered ineffective by this further weakening of the treaty body system and its failure to sufficiently counter the rise of populism.

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<sup>1</sup> Letter from Ms Bachelet to Chairpersons of the United Nations Human Rights Treaty Bodies, dated 30 April 2019.



For civil society organizations, CEDAW is an indispensable interlocutor and a source of inspiration in the struggle for women's rights. Its work is also crucial in holding States accountable for the failure to protect and respect human rights.

At a time when civil society spaces are shrinking in many national contexts, it is all the more crucial that impunity for human rights violations can be challenged at the UN level.

Now more than ever, we need to see immediate actions. Women's groups request the OHCHR and the Human Rights Council to:

- Ensure that the operational mandate of treaty bodies is adequately funded;
- Ensure the CEDAW review sessions will not be jeopardized by the shortfall in financial resources;
- Plan for extra budgetary funding to address the current shortfall; and
- Give priority to sustainable financing for the treaty bodies in the agenda and ongoing deliberations of the Human Rights Council and General Assembly.

We are at a critical juncture, and we need perhaps more than ever the UN system to be strengthened to pursue human rights, justice and equality for all.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C. Pignone', is written over the printed name 'BE FREE'.

**BE FREE**  
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