

**Delegation from the Swiss Confederation**  
**Position Paper for the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women**

The topics before United Nations (UN) Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) are: Eliminating Child, Early, and Forced Marriage (CEFM) by 2030; and Supporting the Involvement of Women in Governance and Decision-Making. The Swiss Confederation is deeply committed to ensure and improve the implementation of all human rights as they are one of the foundation pillars of the UN. Thus, we promote all kinds of solutions and resolutions to the above-mentioned topics to guarantee security and empowerment of women worldwide, among States, and across borders.

**I. Eliminating Child, Early, and Forced Marriage (CEFM) by 2030**

One out of five girls are married off before her eighteenth birthday worldwide which makes up twelve million girls married off before being an adult each year, according to United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and United Nation Population Fund (UNFPA). The children and women affected by CEFM are deprived of their human rights to health, education and safety, their childhood, and their potential to grow. Victims are neither emotionally nor physically ready to become wives and mothers and are confronted with risks to their health which can occur through complications in pregnancy and childbirth. Furthermore, this issue is correlated with poverty and a lack of education. This leads to a grave decrease of economic opportunity. CEFM thus creates a vicious circle of poverty which can only be fought against by a multi sectoral approach and a way of rethinking conventional gender roles in an international multilateral way.

Taking into account that marriage is an issue of discrimination against women, the General Assembly (GA) adopted the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* (CEDAW) in 1979. The Swiss Confederation highly supports Article 16 of the CEDAW, in which State Parties are called upon raising all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in all matters relating to marriage and family relations. To effectively address CEFM this convention obligates States to ensure free and full consent to marriage. Additionally, we reiterate our commitment to the Human Rights Councils (HRC) resolution 24/23 (2013) on CEFM which calls for a report on preventing CEFM with a particular focus on challenges, achievements, best practices, and implementation gaps to be written in consultation with Member States, civil society, and UN bodies. Acknowledging the importance of pointing out that CEFM is a violation of human rights, the HRC adopted the resolution 29/8 (2015) to demonstrate global support and making it a development priority in the post-2015 development framework. It also goes a step further by introducing the opportunity to discuss practical tools to assist States in the implementation of their human rights. Moreover, the Swiss Confederation has aligned its government's Sustainable Developments Strategies and its international policies on a regional, national, and global level as comprehensively as possible with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda adopted by the GA (2015). Realizing that this issue should be combatted by its roots, we appreciate the work done by the *UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage* launched in 2016. As a result, over two million adolescent girls received life skills and educational support in the form of cash transfers, school materials and payment of transport expenses, to help them stay in school and pursue alternatives to CEFM. Additionally, the programme focused on countering the gender stereotypes that keep girls from school and increased its attention to gender-equitable skills development for adolescent girls to transit from education to decent work. Recognizing that victims of CEFM in the Swiss Confederation are primarily immigrants from the Middle-East and East Africa, we express our congratulations to the African Union (AU) for launching the *Campaign to End Child Marriage* which aims to speed up change across Africa by encouraging governments to develop strategies to raise awareness and address harmful impacts.

The Swiss Confederation sees the need to accelerate action on CEFM as it creates a form of isolation, a limitation of freedom and a disempowerment of women. Even though the amount of country programmes that prioritized ending CEFM in the framework of the Gender Action Plan (GAP) of UNICEF has risen and a decline in the prevalence of this harmful practice has become visible over the last decades, more can be done. Therefore, the Swiss Confederation calls for comprehensive sex education as a key component to GAP to prevent and end CEFM, in order to promote and protect the human rights of all women and girls, including their right to have control

over and decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their sexuality. It is of uttermost importance to empower women and girls worldwide, ensure their human rights, improve their access to education, and ensure their economic wellbeing. We invite all Member States to join forces toward to a world in which adolescent girls enjoy the same rights and safety as any other person in our world.

## **II. Supporting the Involvement of Women in Governance and Decision-Making**

Women continue to be underrepresented at all levels of political leadership. As at 1 January 2019, women's representation in national Parliaments ranged from 0 to 61.3 per cent, with the average standing at 24.2 per cent, an increase from 19 per cent in 2010. The Swiss Federation welcomes this progress, but yet more must be achieved. Women's effective participation in public life and their representation in state institutions are essential for creating a fair, peaceful and inclusive society. Across all borders measures to create an enabling environment and opportunities for women to equally participate in defining the priorities in social, economic, political life, in all areas of sustainable development and peacebuilding need to be implemented. On the grounds of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (1948) all rights and freedoms and international principles are applicable to all people without regard to sex, thereby a foundation for gender equality was established. Acknowledging the importance of equal participation in decision-making in providing more accurate representation of the needs of society, balancing and strengthening democracy, and ensuring that the interests of women are addressed the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA) was adopted in 1995. The Swiss Confederation further actively supports the need for gender equality in government and decision-making in order to progress the advancement of women in all other areas by developing and supporting courses of action that increase women's representation, influence and political power in local governance, in the decentralisation and public finance management, as well as in elections and democratic transitions. Therefore, we highly appreciate the work done by all Member States that have committed to participate in the *Planet 50-50 by 2030: Step It Up for Gender Equality Initiative*, which provides aid to governments that aim for strengthening legislation, policies and national action plans regarding this topic. Noting that the participation of women in peacebuilding processes, such as lasting of agreements, has a measurable positive impact, we welcome the resolution 1325 (2000) adopted by the Security Council (SC). In order to advocate the involvement of women in governance and decision-making the discriminatory public opinion against women needs to be addressed. By resolving this issue multiple targets of the SDGs which the Swiss Confederation deeply and actively commits to, naming targets number 3, 5 and 10, would be fulfilled. Gender equality requires awareness and a change in mindset to address prevalent gender gaps caused by discriminatory practices, norms and social values. This is why engaging men and boys is essential for bringing together one half of humanity in support of the other for the benefit of all. We thus encourage the *He For She Campaign* of UN-Women that invites men and people of all gender to stand in solidarity with women to create a visible and united force for gender equality.

While progress has been made in implementing the Women, Peace and Security normative agenda, many initiatives remain ad hoc and short-term, and good practice has not been examined yet. Thus, a strategic plan needs to be designed to change short-term agendas into long-term agendas to create more structural interventions that address determinants of the enabling environment for Women, Peace and Security. These include the following aspects of: attitudinal and cultural biases, establishment of national action plans, finance, capacity development and strengthening of accountability and justice mechanisms. Therefore, we call upon all Member States to contribute actively to a society that is more equal, inclusive and prosperous, for the good of all. We firmly believe that such a society can offer better opportunities for everyone – women as well as men. The Swiss Confederation is looking forward to constructively engage in debates with all Member States to commonly examine ways to resolve this pressing matter remaining at hand.