



INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF WOMEN LAWYERS (FIDA) RESOLUTIONS OF THE 37TH INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION

The 37th International Convention of the International Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA) under the theme “From Barriers to Bridges” held from Monday, 15 February to Wednesday, 17 February, 2021. The Convention was initially scheduled to be held in Geneva, Switzerland in November 2020; however, due to the Covid19 pandemic restrictions and protocols, it was held virtually on the Demio webinar platform.

The Convention which had delegates from twenty-four (24) countries spread across five (5) continents, began with a colourful opening ceremony featuring a keynote speech by the Honorable Ruth Bowe-Darville, Justice of the Supreme Court of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas. Acknowledging that the theme was timely and noting the success of FIDA and its continued commitment to eliminating the many social barriers, by providing bridges as solutions in the quest for equality and justice; she urged FIDA to hold high the flag of equality on top of the bridge. Giovanna Chiara of Italy was honoured as the FIDA International Leadership Awardee for 2021.

Following the panel discussions on various topics, delegates deliberated and resolved as follows:

1. *Economic Rights of Women: A Comparative Analysis*

- i. **Acknowledged** that there are existing global and regional covenants, with some national legislation on economic rights for women and although progress has been made, gender gaps and the gender divide still exist, creating barriers to economic rights.
- ii. **Acknowledged** that the heightened Covid-19 pandemic travel restrictions, lockdowns, job losses, health care needs, digitization of economic activities impact differently on women; the majority of whom are in the unregulated informal sector, characterized by underpaid or unpaid services.
- iii. **Noted** that limited access to and knowledge of credit and banking facilities; lack of technology tools and literacy represent a hindrance to the economic empowerment of women.
- iv. **Noted** also that empowerment programmes for women’s economic rights exist at global, regional and national levels, which provide networks for the integration of women’s economic activities into mainstream economic platforms; with attendant mentoring, thereby enhancing access and participation in nation building.
- v. **Recognised** the linkage between Gender Based Violence, gender equality and economic rights and their effect on sustainable development of national economies and the contribution of women to their national gross domestic products.

Resolved to:

- a. Urge Governments to create a gendered response; which includes a transformative and sustainable empowerment strategy with an outcome-based structure, starting from the political will at the level of policy makers to the grass root mobilizers of the national economy.
- b. Advocate for entrepreneurship education; gender inclusive business policies; financial literacy; access to capital and market information; business linkages for trade; and continuous coaching and mentoring to support the transformation of women from producers/supporters to business owners/leaders; while creating wealth, employment and growing the national economy.

2. *Women's Health and Well- Being: Connecting Mind, Body and Spirit*

- i. Recognized that women are more predisposed to mental illness than other sexes on account of societal pressures placed on them.
- ii. Noted that new stressors on women in the wake of Covid-19 has increased mental health challenges.
- iii. Acknowledged that through menstrual and mental health education including knowledge of proper social construct of gender, women and girls' mental health could be properly addressed.
- iv. Acknowledged that with a sufficient social support system, women and girls suppressed by negative discrimination, can become more confident and empowered.

Resolved to:

- a. Work on promoting gender equality and mental health education for menstrual health.
- b. Work to strengthen strategies to reduce violence against young women.
- c. Lobby and advocate for the integration of culturally appropriate talk therapy into existing health care platforms so that women and girls with mental health problems can be helped.

3. *Information Technology- A Bridge or A Barrier to Women's Right and Access to Justice*

- i. **Concerned** that navigating justice is disproportionately complex for many women due to gender discrimination, lack of knowledge of their rights, lack of the means and knowledge of technology tools, in addition to social, economic, and educational disadvantages.
- ii. **Recognized** that closing the gender gap in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) would help close gender gaps in income and leadership.
- iii. **Acknowledged** that information technology is a bridge that needs to be embraced, prioritised and harnessed; a fundamental enabler of women's rights and access to justice; an enhancer of socio-economic resilience in the face of the pandemic and in the post-pandemic world; a provider in real time; and a secure and private connection to people, services, and content.

- iv. **Noted** that while some governments provide social benefits and entitlements for women to live with dignity and access justice more easily; the implementation of these policies remain extremely poor, mostly due to entrenched discrimination.
- v. **Recognised** the critical importance of sound, segregated data for setting agenda, defining strategies, eliciting better responses to issues, creating resilience to economies and access to justice.

Resolved to:

- a. Advocate for and support the mobilization of technology tools to women; “putting laptops in the hands of the underprivileged”.
- b. Urge countries to implement data policies and strategies that allow them to measure, track, monitor and evaluate the life cycle of policies once implemented.
- c. Advocate for the creation of effective online educational programs that make STEM education, up-skilling courses, and vocational training more affordable, accessible, and inclusive.
- d. Advocate for the reduction and mitigation of gender biases and stigmas; legal information literacy through continuous awareness campaigns; bringing justice to the doorstep.
- e. Collaborate extensively with government and non-government agencies, civil society organisations at global, regional, and national levels, to improve information technology, protect women in physical spaces, track progress in the provision of legal services and promote equal access to justice.

4. *Facing Challenges – A Broad Spectrum from Living with Disabilities To Eradicating Gender Based Violence*

- i. Acknowledged that globally, 1 in 3 women are victims of physical, emotional, or sexual abuse and that gender-based violence is a human rights violation.
- ii. Noted that women with disabilities encounter many inequalities and abuse; physically, emotionally, psychologically, sexually and economically as they are deemed invisible to society and treated as charity cases - unfit to live with a partner or become a mother, with their care givers becoming their abusers.
- iii. Noted that globally, close to 1 billion persons experience disabilities with 19.2% being women and 12% being men; with little to no access to education, work and employment and thus are unable to provide for basic needs for themselves and their children.
- iv. Acknowledged that persons living with disabilities have the right to self-sufficient independent lives and protection policies must include family, school, work, and the removal of architectural barriers.
- v. Acknowledged the global and regional conventions that create the framework of legislation to protect women against any form of violence.

Resolved to:

- a. Urge states to pass legislation and adopt or implement existing policies, which encourage equality amongst women who are at a disadvantage and protect the economic and property rights of women, consistent with constitutional provisions prohibiting discrimination and advocating equality.
- b. Advocate for stronger laws for gender-based violence violations against the offender and for the protection of victims of abuse.
- c. Urge victims and the community to utilize social media platforms to speak out against gender-based violence, form online support groups for victims and the community to share information.
- d. Advocate for all buildings and premises such as court rooms and police stations to be accessible for women and girls with disabilities; and the availability of and access to sign language and braille signage services, as well as interpreters.
- e. Advocate for access to interest-free and start-up loans to enable women with disabilities and victims of gender-based violence to have greater economic mobility and economic independence.
- f. Engage in disability awareness and sensitization campaigns for the wider community and train and empower the public to recognize and report persons who may be victims of gender-based violence.
- g. Advocate for the right to access freely and consciously, chosen health services (voluntary sterilization as a form of permanent contraception) for women with disabilities; as well as the right to prior “informed, free and aware consent” to such services and the absence of coercion.
- h. Urge the community to treat women with disabilities with respect, and not pity and to secure the rights needed to manage their lives effectively.

5. *Transitional Justice Mechanisms in Protection of Women’s Rights*

- i. Noted that during the judicial process in sexual violence cases, the explicit details of what the victim suffered are observed and used by all parties including the judge and prosecutors in the adjudication of the case. Using these details again in the sentencing phase, amounts to re-victimization.
- ii. Observed that in many countries around the world, all decisions and debates regarding the creation and implementation of laws involve only men, and the female perspective is not considered.
- iii. Acknowledged that in many high courts around the world, a great number of decisions are made without considering the female perspective. This is true even when the case may have a serious impact on the rights of women and children.

Resolved to:

- a. Urge FIDA member countries to review the process of the application of laws involving sexual violence to ensure that, within the sentencing phase, the victims are not burdened with repetition of the details of the crimes committed against them.
- b. Advocate for all member countries to include female perspectives in the creation and implementation of any laws.
- c. Advocate for special gender commissions to provide gender training on the human rights of women and children to all high court judges and magistrates in the judiciary.

6. *FIDA and The Protection of Women's Rights - Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow (An Intergenerational Discourse)*

- i. Acknowledged the role of FIDA in the protection of women's rights over the past seventy-seven (77) years, and the consequent transformative power in laws, policies and lives of women and society.
- ii. Noted that much work still needs to be done through legislative and policy frameworks to question patriarchal power and privileges manifesting in norms and values that disempower women.
- iii. Noted the critical importance of women being politically engaged, and for women in leadership to have a simple, yet well-grounded agenda to ensure a sustainable legacy of social justice, equity, fairness and truth for great positive resultant effects and accomplishment for women at all levels.
- iv. Recognised the importance of intergenerational organizing for mentoring, empowering and supporting women in business, politics and governance; and for building strong durable institutions aimed at promoting a culture of excellence and competence in FIDA.
- v. Acknowledged the critical importance of legislative and policy frameworks in the protection of women's rights, especially in the constantly evolving trends of women's realities, with new manifestations of discrimination, so that they can be properly addressed.

Resolved to:

- a. Advocate for constitutional guarantees for effective representation and participation of women in leadership and governance through affirmative action and the use of quotas.
- b. Urge women to participate more in science, technology, engineering and mathematics studies and careers as bridges for equal opportunities and for overcoming obstacles that hinder progress.
- c. Re-evaluate its methodologies in line with 21st Century technology realities to increase the participation of members of different ages, location and experience in championing its causes and sustaining its impact.

Dated the 17th Day of February 2021

Members of the Resolutions Committee

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