



The Bogota Declaration on Tax Justice for Women's Rights 2017

***Organizations are invited to sign in support of this Declaration at <http://bit.ly/2AtpYE2>**

We, the participants of the first global convening on tax justice for women's rights held 13-15 June, 2017 in Bogota, Colombia, come together as a global community of women – advocates and activists, lawyers and jurists, academics and practitioners, and public services trade unionists – as a united voice for tax justice with the aim to establish and to confirm powerful, common positions to underpin concerted actions over the following years and to shift the narrative on tax justice for women's rights. We recognize and are committed to advancing solutions to address the denial of women's human rights as regressive tax systems support and create the increasing impoverishment and marginalization of women in the global economy.

We express our appreciation to the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Global Alliance for Tax Justice, Tax Justice Network, Public Services International, and Colombian partners for hosting the first global convening on tax justice for women's rights and for providing all the necessary support.

We note with gratitude the role and contribution of the global community of women in making this conference a success, including diverse presentations, press, online and social media engagements, and building on the tax justice for women's rights global days of action campaign coordinated together with the Global Alliance for Tax Justice, global trade unions, and CSO partners held in March 2017.

We recall the commitments by world leaders, including on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the UN CSW61 Agreed Conclusions, and the Addis Ababa Agenda for Action (Financing for Development 69/313), which despite their limitations commit governments to take the necessary measures to raise resources for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. These commitments sit alongside Article 2.1 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR 1976), which calls on each State Party to progressively realise rights by maximising its available resources.

We further note that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) declares that 'everyone is entitled to (...) the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration' (Article 28), without distinctions

based on sex; that the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) recognizes ‘the equal rights of men and women to enjoy all economic, social, cultural, civil, and political rights’ (preamble), and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) calls for the mobilization of resources at the national and international levels for the advancement of women.

We demand the full and explicit reference to these policy and legislative commitments to national and international obligations to raise the revenues necessary to realize these goals, to raise such revenues through progressive tax laws that recognize and promote women’s rights, and to spend such revenues in ways that eliminate long standing structural inequalities between women and men, through the provision of universal access to public education, health, care, water, sanitation, transportation, social protection, and between the politically disenfranchised and power holders, and among countries at different levels of development and economic sustainability.

We recognize the challenges that women face in light of inadequate financing for implementing the Sustainable Development Goals and provision of public services. Too often, women’s voices go unheard in the policy debates dominated by global capital. As national governments accommodate corporate demands for tax incentives, rights to land, water, and government subsidies while ignoring women’s demands that corporations be taxed fairly, the needs of women and all those concerned with the wellbeing of human societies are increasingly neglected.

We note that the mantra of ‘taxing for growth’ has been promoted by the World Bank, the IMF, the OECD, and the EU in making fiscal recommendations for high- and low-income countries alike. Their country-specific tax policy recommendations are adapted to national conditions, but the basic formula for ‘tax cuts for growth’ has been virtually the same everywhere: cut progressive individual and corporate tax rates; raise more revenue with high-rate ‘flat’ consumption tax rates such as regressive VAT and commodity taxes; give special tax breaks on investment incomes, savings, and capital gains; and cut social safety nets to reduce government budgets.

In high-income countries, the result has been falling tax ratios (tax revenues as a share of GDP). This has led to continued budget cuts to government services and programs – literally, permanent government austerities. In low-income countries, even those with increasing tax ratios, the result has been increasing reliance on gender and income regressive VAT and commodity taxes that are particularly burdensome for those without economic security, and decreasing use of progressive personal and corporate income taxes that should be used to raise more revenues from those with higher incomes.

We recognize that the end result of ‘taxing for growth’ regimes has been increasing concentration of incomes and wealth in the hands of small numbers of very wealthy individuals and of large corporations. Growing income inequalities between the Global North and South, between the rich and everyone else, and between women and men have reached crisis levels in countries at every level of development.

We acknowledge that democratic states have always relied on taxation revenues as the main source of funding to meet all the needs and rights of their citizens.

We are concerned that:

1. Tax allocation on the basis of ability to pay taxes, and on the basis of progressively higher taxes for those with higher incomes, is increasingly being ignored as high rates of consumption taxes

(VAT or GST (goods and services tax)) are used to replace graduated tax rates on high incomes of wealthy persons and corporations.

2. Governments are less concerned to fund universal education, health, water, and care services, provide public social security and pensions, and protect the fundamental economic and social rights of all women.
3. On the basis of the legal definition of corporations as legal 'persons' with all the legal rights of natural persons, national governments and international financial institutions permit corporations to roam the world freely in sweeping up ever-growing shares of land, natural resources, revenue, and financial capital.
4. There are now more corporations than national states among the top one hundred entities with the highest annual revenues (2015), and these corporations are outperforming all but the few richest countries. This is of real concern, because while women still struggle using constitutional, human rights, and international human rights laws to gain voting rights and elected positions in national governments, women still play relatively small roles in state governance.
5. Women are severely underrepresented in corporate ownership and governance, and far fewer constitutional, human rights, and international laws ensure women's equal representation in the development, investment, and tax paying decisions made by large transnational manufacturing, extraction, and financial corporations. As corporate perspectives increasingly influence global governance, women's space for policy influence is becoming even more constrained at the same time that their own wellbeing is increasingly dependent on corporate governance decisions.
6. Tax policies focused entirely on promoting economic growth have empowered and rewarded male-dominated corporations, enabled tax havens to provide tax-free zones for wealth holders and corporations, and provided legal space for corporations to build supply chains around tax holidays, business tax incentives, special economic zones, and low-tax countries. At the same time, tax policies that affect women, including high VAT/GST rates on women's low incomes provide limited funding for public services needed for human development, but continue to rationalize keeping taxes paid by high income earners and businesses low.

We are convinced that

1. Without significant changes in taxation systems to reward measures that increase equality and sustainability and create gender responsive fiscal systems, the decline of states answerable to citizens in favour of corporations answerable to their own interests will continue unchallenged.
2. It is vitally important for multinational corporations and wealthy individuals to pay their share of taxes, and for all countries to be at the table to decide international tax policies.
3. Without progressive tax policies, our governments cannot deliver on human rights obligations to their citizens, and it is women and girls who are hurt the most when denied adequate quality public education, healthcare, housing, access to functioning judicial systems, resources for prevention of violence against women, access to clean water, and sanitation, and adequate incomes.

We therefore

Renew our commitments to collaborate with multilateral organizations including but not limited to the UN, state and non-state actors, and all relevant stakeholders at domestic, regional, and global levels, to promote tax justice for women's rights;

Agree to establish a global movement of tax justice for women's rights working together through the Global Alliance for Tax Justice and our respective organizations and networks to promote an inclusive equitable international financial architecture that promotes tax justice, sustainable development and economic growth for all.

Commit to regular global convenings on tax justice for women's rights to strategize together, take stock of progress and highlight challenges to inform future advocacy actions.

Call on governments to ensure that

1. The negative gender effects of all existing tax, spending, international policies, and other fiscal laws should be corrected as a matter of urgency.
2. No jurisdiction should enact any new tax or spending laws, programs, or practices that increase market or after-tax income gender gaps.
3. All available resources are maximized to invest in quality, gender-responsive public services, the care economy, and social protection. 'Taxing for women's rights' calls for producing enough revenue to increase government investments in public education, health, care services, transportation, food security, and housing in order to reduce women's markedly unequal shares of unpaid work and increase women's shares of market incomes, after-tax incomes, and political authority.
4. All levels of government practice gender budgeting so that they do not discriminate against women; ensure women have an equal say in how public money is spent.
5. All tax revenues are raised in the most progressive way possible – through direct taxation of income, wealth, and high net worth individuals – and ensure that multinational corporations pay their share. Flat-rated low and minimally graduated rates of personal and corporate income and capital taxes should be converted immediately to income tax structures with graduated rates – truly 'progressive' tax structures – that base tax liability on ability to pay both by those with low incomes and by those with high incomes.
6. Tax impact assessments are carried out on a continuing basis – especially the assessments of their impact on the poorest women.
7. National and regional tax and financial secrecy policies do not contribute to large-scale tax abuse in other countries and are not biased towards wealthy countries, corporations, or the wealthy elite.
8. National governments and regional organisations support the establishment of an inclusive intergovernmental UN Global Tax Commission, where all countries, not just the G20, have an equal seat at the table and equal voice in setting international tax policies.
9. All revenue systems 'tax for sex equality' by adopting all these features:
 - i. Progressive personal and corporate income taxes generate at least 60% of all domestic revenues;
 - ii. Supplementary allowances are provided for all individuals in paid work earning less than above-poverty incomes;
 - iii. Income supplements promote not just part-time or occasional paid work, but full time permanent decent paid work;
 - iv. Tax exemptions ensure that no income taxes or social contribution taxes can tax individuals back into poverty;
 - v. Income tax rates enable governments to redistribute market incomes from those with the highest incomes to those with the lowest and modest incomes;

- vi. Cost of living mechanisms keep progressive income tax rates in sync with actual costs of living;
- vii. Tax exemptions are high enough to ensure that no one pays personal income or social contribution taxes if their incomes are below poverty levels, and public food, housing, education, transportation, and income supplements keep everyone above poverty levels;
- viii. All adults are taxed as individuals and ensure that all tax benefits, cash benefits, and in kind government services are given to women as individuals in order to protect their financial autonomy;
- ix. Adequate tax-free allowances are provided for dependent children during all schooling years;
- x. Any provisions that deliver tax benefits in lieu of public or direct grants are eliminated (i.e., eliminate all tax expenditures, which do not generally reach those with low incomes);
- xi. All tax, cash, and in-kind benefits that subsidize women's unpaid work and thereby create tax barriers to women's paid work are repealed;
- xii. Fixed tax systems (such as presumptive or imputed taxes) and informal or illegal taxes (such as fees or charges claimed by informal actors) aimed at informal, marginal, and small businesses are replaced with low taxes on actual profits, and government programs build financial capacity on the part of micro and small traders;
- xiii. Especially in low-income countries, restructure income security measures as direct contributory systems funded largely by employers and governments for all those unable to accumulate sufficient capital to provide for their own lifelong income security;
- xiv. Reward workers and businesses entering the formal reported economy with meaningful supports, but prohibit the use of punitive tax compliance and regulatory measures.

Organizations are invited to sign on in support of this Declaration at <http://bit.ly/2AtpYE2>