**CALL TO ACTION TO PROMOTE GENDER PARITY WITHIN THE CRPD COMMITTEE, ALL TREATY BODIES & INTERNATIONAL & REGIONAL BODIES**

In June 2016, elections were held for the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD Committee) which yielded a composition of only one woman member amongst 17 men members, starting from 1 January 2017. This lamentable result has served as an alarm for concerted efforts and action to ensure gender balance across all bodies, including within the United Nations human rights treaty bodies.

Despite explicit references to the need to consider gender balance within the CRPD Committee elections (Article 34(4), CRPD)[[1]](#footnote-1) and treaty body elections generally (General Assembly Resolution 68/28),[[2]](#footnote-2) within representation at the United Nations (Article 8, UN Charter)[[3]](#footnote-3) and at the international level entirely (Article 8, CEDAW),[[4]](#footnote-4) and calls made by the CRPD Committee and civil society for States Parties to be attentive to gender parity within the nominations and elections processes, these calls went unheeded.

The CRPD Committee now stands as the treaty body with the fewest number of women members,[[5]](#footnote-5) and could represent the worst example of gender parity in treaty body history. It is all the more deplorable considering that non-discrimination and equality between men and women are enshrined as general principles within the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), and that there is a specific provision concerning women with disabilities which calls on States Parties “to take all appropriate measures to ensure the full development, advancement and empowerment of women, for the purpose of guaranteeing them the exercise and enjoyment of the human rights and fundamental freedoms set out in the present Convention.” Further, the recently adopted Sustainable Development Goals seek to realise the human rights of all and to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls (Goal 5).

Although progress has been made in the last decades to advance women’s rights on the one hand, and the rights of persons with disabilities on the other, international, regional and national policymaking has failed to be fully inclusive of women and girls with disabilities. Compared to men with disabilities and women generally, women with disabilities experience higher levels of exclusion from education and employment, and are at higher risk of violence, neglect and poverty, being subjected to multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination on the basis of their gender, disability and other layers of their identities. This current state of affairs is both a cause and consequence for women with disabilities finding themselves on the fringes of human rights movements. Ensuring gender parity within the CRPD Committee and other decision-making bodies is essential to guaranteeing that the rights of women and girls with disabilities are protected and promoted.

While States Parties are responsible for the nomination and election of independent and impartial candidates for treaty bodies, and acknowledging that there is much room for improvement in terms of ensuring transparency in these processes, the responsibility extends to all actors to promote gender parity across human rights treaty bodies. It is incumbent on us all- States, NHRIs, independent monitoring mechanisms, the women’s movement, the disability movement, the human rights and development community- at the national, regional and global levels- to be proactive in ensuring the inclusion of women across all agendas. We can only get there together, leaving no one behind.

In this context, the relevance of the GQUAL campaign is all the more heightened; the GQUAL campaign was conceived seeking to improve women’s representation in international tribunals and monitoring bodies by helping to change the norms, guidelines, and practices that regulate the nomination and voting processes through which the composition of these bodies is determined. GQUAL aims to achieve change both, by getting a significant number of States to incorporate gender parity as a criteria in their nomination and voting (Pledge GQUAL), and by helping to change or introduce new rules, guidelines and mechanisms that can help promote women’s equal representation into the practices, policies, and normative framework of the targeted international bodies. To be effective, these efforts need to be complemented with a) improved and more transparent and participatory selection processes at the national and international level, b) a better understanding of the effects of women’s absence or under-representation in these spaces and of the rights that may be affected, and c) the consolidation of a robust and engaged global network.

In light of the negative result of gender representation of the CRPD Committee and the general picture of gender disparity across international monitoring bodies, all actors (States, NHRIs, independent monitoring mechanisms, treaty body and other human rights experts, civil society organisations, and women’s rights, disability rights, and human rights advocates, etc) are encouraged to sign this call to action. By doing so, we, the undersigned:

* **Sign the** [**GQUAL Declaration**](http://www.gqualcampaign.org/about-gqual/the-gqual-declaration/) **and join the** [**GQUAL campaign**](http://www.gqualcampaign.org/our-work/) **to commit to promoting gender parity including across all treaty bodies, other international bodies and tribunals, Special procedures, and regional and international organisations;**
* **Publicly pledge to guarantee parity when nominating and electing candidates for all treaty bodies, other international bodies and tribunals, Special procedures, and regional and international organisations;**
* **Commit, in particular, to promoting the nomination of women candidates towards achieving an all women’s candidates list for the 2018 CRPD Committee elections (during which nine out of the eighteen seats within the Committee will be filled and given that the mandate of the sole remaining woman member will come to an end);**
* **Commit to promoting the inclusion and participation of women with disabilities in decision-making at national, regional and international fora across all sectors, among others gender equality, disability rights, human rights and development.**

1. “The members of the Committee shall be elected by States Parties, consideration being given to equitable geographical distribution, representation of the different forms of civilization and of the principal legal systems, balanced gender representation and participation of experts with disabilities.” Article 34(4), Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. “*Encourages* States parties, in the election of treaty body experts, to give due consideration, as stipulated in the relevant human rights instruments, to equitable geographical distribution, the representation of the different forms of civilization and the principal legal systems, balanced gender representation and the participation of experts with disabilities in the membership of the human rights treaty bodies”, General Assembly Resolution 68/286, A/RES/68/268, 9 April 2014, para 13 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. “The United Nations shall place no restrictions on the eligibility of men and women to participate in any capacity and under conditions of equality in its principal and subsidiary organs.” Article 8, UN Charter, 1945 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. “States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure to women, on equal terms with men and without any discrimination, the opportunity to represent their Governments at the international level and to participate in the work of international organizations.” Article 8, UN Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 1979 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. One woman (out of 18 members) from 2017- a significant departure from its previous compositions of six women (out of 18 members) in 2014-2016; seven women (out of 18 members) in 2012-2014; eight women (out of 18 members) in 2010-2012; and five women (out of 12 members) in 2008-2010 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)