



# Declaration

**Global Symposium on Engaging Men and Boys on  
Achieving Gender Equality  
Rio de Janeiro  
March 29 – April 3, 2009**

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## **PART ONE: PREAMBLE**

**WE COME FROM EIGHTY COUNTRIES.** We are men and women, young and old, working side by side with respect and shared goals. We are active in community organizations, religious and educational institutions; we are representatives of governments, NGOs and the United Nations. We speak many languages, we look like the diverse peoples of the world and carry their diverse beliefs and religions, cultures, physical abilities, and sexual and gender identities. We are indigenous peoples, immigrants, and ones whose ancestors moved across the planet. We are fathers and mothers, daughters and sons, brothers and sisters, partners and lovers, husbands and wives. \_\_What unites us is our strong outrage at the inequality that still plagues the lives of women and girls, and the self-destructive demands we put on boys and men. But even more so, what brings us together here is a powerful sense of hope, expectation, and possibility for we have seen the capacity of men and boys to change, to care, to cherish, to love passionately, and to work for justice for all.

We are outraged by the pandemic of violence women face at the hands of some men, by the relegation of women to second class status, and the continued domination by men of our economies, of our politics, of our social and cultural institutions, in far too many of our homes. We also know that among women there are those who fare even worse because of their social class, their religion, their language, their physical differences, their ancestry, their sexual orientation, or simply where they live.

There are deep costs to boys and men from the ways our societies have defined men's power and raised boys to be men. Boys deny their humanity in search of an armor-plated masculinity. Young men and boys are sacrificed as cannon fodder in war for those men of political, economic, and religious power who demand conquest and domination at any cost. Many men cause terrible harm to



themselves because they deny their own needs for physical and mental care or lack services when they are in need.

Too many men suffer because our male-dominated world is not only one of power of men over women, but of some groups of men over others. Too many men, like too many women, live in terrible poverty, in degradation, or are forced to do body- or soul-destroying work to put food on the table.

Too many men carry the deep scars of trying to live up to the impossible demands of manhood and find terrible solace in risk-taking, violence, self-destruction or the drink and drugs sold to make a profit for others. Too many men experience violence at the hands of other men.

Too many men are stigmatized and punished for the simple fact they love, desire and have sex with other men.

We are here because we know that the time when women stood alone in speaking out against discrimination and violence – that this time is coming to an end.

We also know this: This belief in the importance of engaging men and boys is no longer a remote hope. We see the emergence of organizations and campaigns that are directly involving hundreds of thousands, millions of men in almost every country on the planet. We hear men and boys speaking out against violence, practicing safer sex, and supporting women's and girl's reproductive rights. We see men caring, loving, and nurturing for other men and for women. We see men who embrace the daily challenges of looking after babies and children, and delight in their capacity to be nurturers. We see many men caring for the planet and rejecting conquering nature just as men once conquered women.

We are gathering not simply to celebrate our first successes, but, with all the strength we possess, to appeal to parents, teachers, and coaches, to the media and businesses, to our governments, NGOs, religious institutions, and the United Nations, to mobilize the political will and economic resources required to increase the scale and impact of work with men and boys to promote gender equality. We know how critical it is that institutions traditionally controlled by men reshape their policies and priorities to support gender equality and the well-being of women, children, and men. And we know that a critical part of that is to reshape the world of men and boys, the beliefs of men and boys, and the lives of men and boys.



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## **PART TWO: THE PLAN OF ACTION**

**The Evidence Base is There** : New initiatives and programs to engage men and boys in gender equality provides a growing body of evidence that confirms it is possible to change men's gender-related attitudes and practices. Effective programs and processes have led men and boys to stand up against violence and for gender equality in both their personal lives and their communities. These initiatives not only help deconstruct harmful masculinities, but reconstruct more gender equitable ones. Global research makes it increasingly clear that working with men and boys can reduce violence, improve relationships, strengthen the work of the women's movement, improve health outcomes of women and men, girls and boys, and that it is possible to accelerate this change through deliberate interventions.

**Working with the Women's Movement** : The work with men and boys stems from and honors the pioneering work and ongoing leadership of the women's movement. We stand in solidarity with the ongoing struggles for women's empowerment and rights in our commitment to contribute to the myriad efforts to achieve gender equality. By working in close synergy with women's rights organizations, we aim to change individual men's attitudes and practices, and transform the imbalance of power between men and women in relationships, families, communities, institutions and nations.

**International and UN Commitments** : Through the UN and other international agreements, the nations of the world have committed themselves to taking action to involve men and boys in achieving of gender equality. Policy makers have an obligation to act on these commitments to develop, implement and evaluate policy and programming approaches to working with men. These commitments provide civil society activists with leverage to demand rapid implementation.

These international commitments include:

- **The 1994 International Conference on Population and Development**
- **The Programme of Action of the World Summit on Social Development (1995)**
- **The Beijing Platform for Action (1995)**
- **The twenty-sixth special session of the General Assembly on HIV/AIDS (2001)**
- **The United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), at its 48th session in 2004**



To achieve transformative and sustainable social change around gender inequalities, we must go beyond scattered, short-term and small scale interventions and harness all efforts towards systemic, large-scale, and coordinated action. *The time has come for us to fulfill these commitments.*

### **PART THREE: A PLATFORM FOR ACTION**

**Violence against women** : For too long, all forms of violence including humiliation and emotional violence against women and girls has been seen primarily as a “women’s issue” and has been invisible, regarded as a private matter and been the concern of the women’s movement. Patriarchal structures sustain this impunity and endorses men’s silence on this issue. Men and boys’ accountability and engagement for social transformation is essential to bring violence free lives for women and girls.

**Violence against children** : Girls and boys suffer from abuse and violence, including corporal and other forms of humiliating and degrading punishment, in the home, , school and institutions that should protect them. Gender norms are implicated in this violence by condoning different forms of violence for boys and girls. This calls for a life cycle approach, engaging with boys to understand the consequences for violent behavior and take positive action for violence prevention.

**Violence Amongst Men** : We also have to address different forms of violence amongst men and boys that include armed conflict, gang violence, school bullying and homophobic crimes. Inequity is also at the core of these manifestations of violence, risk taking and seeking of dominance of other men. Men’s own experiences of violence have devastating effects on us all and create repeating cycles of violence.

**Violence In Armed Conflict** : In wars, communal, ethnic based and other forms of armed conflict young men are treated as expendable and sent to their deaths in large numbers. Militaries and other armed groups that violate international laws on the treatment of civilians in conflict explicitly condone and even encourage the use of sexual violence as a method of warfare, explicitly privileging militarized models of masculinity and ensuring that those men who do refuse violence are belittled and subject to stigma including homophobic violence. Girls and boys are increasingly drawn into armed conflict, both as victims and perpetrators. We call on national governments, to uphold Security Council Resolutions including 1308, 1325, 1612 and 1820 and to



proactively contribute to the elimination of all forms of gendered violence, including in times of armed conflict.

**Men, work and the global political economy** : Men's roles are strongly influenced by the global political economy. The values competition, consumption, and aggressive accumulation and assertion of power – military, economic, financial, social or cultural, reinforce practices of domination and use of violence at the interpersonal and community levels throughout the life-cycle. The dominant economic models have led to increasing economic vulnerability, frequent forced migration and lost livelihoods .. We must challenge the economic and political policies and institutions that drive inequalities.

**Fatherhood** : Responsible, committed and involved fatherhood is an essential component of any attempt to transform families and societies into new norms that better reflect gender equity, child rights and shared parenting responsibilities and enjoyment. It is in the home that gender inequality is at its most powerful and sometimes most hidden. Positive fatherhood therefore plays an important part in challenging the intergenerational transmission of damaging stereotypes and power relations. More commitment must be demonstrated to strengthening father roles and supporting men to realize their potential to facilitate their children's attitudes and practices and, as men heal themselves from damaging and restrictive negative gender roles.

**Men as Caregivers** : Societies expect women and girls to take responsibility for the care work that sustains and replenishes families, communities, economies and societies, including raising children and taking care of the sick and the elderly. This frequently prevents women and girls from accessing their fundamental human rights to health, education, employment and full political participation. Governments, civil society organisations, UN agencies, the private sector and donor organisations must put in place strategies that shift gender norms and encourage men to share with women the joys and burdens of caring for others.

**Sexual and Gender Diversities and Sexual Rights** : There are profound diversities among men and boys in their sexual and gender identities and relations. Formal and informal patterns of sexual injustice, homophobia, social exclusion and oppression throughout the world shape men's and boys' access to civil rights, health care, personal safety, and the recognition and affirmation of their intimate relations. Constructions of masculinity in many contexts are based on ruthless hostility to gendered sexual



behaviours that contradict dominant patriarchal norms, and policed through heterosexist violence. Programming and policy engaging men and boys must recognize and affirm sexual diversity among men and boys, and support the positive rights of men of all sexualities to sexual pleasure and well-being.

**Men's and Boys' Gender Related Vulnerabilities** : Men and boys die early from preventable diseases, accidents and violence. Most men have higher death rates for the same sicknesses that affect women. We need to promote health among boys and young men and enable them to acquire health seeking behaviours for themselves, as well as for their families. The emotional and subjective level and personal experience of men and boys has to be addressed to better understand the root problems like violence suicide, drug abuse, accidents and the lack of a health seeking behaviour. Though it is not often mentioned mental health dimensions are always present in other issues dealing with sexual and reproductive health, fathering and gender based violence. Gender responsive and socio-culturally sensitive mental health programs and services are needed to address and prevent these issues at community level.

**Sexual Exploitation** : Men's use of sexual violence results from social norms that condone the exploitation of women and girls, boys and men. Objectification and commodification of women and girls and boys and men normalizes violent and coercive sexual behaviours. Ending sexual violence and exploitation requires holistic strategies from the global to local level to engage men and boys in challenging attitudes that give men dominance, and treating all human beings with dignity and respect.

**Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights** : Sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) are largely considered as only a women's domain, leaving women and girls responsible for their own sexual health, and that of their families and communities. In a sexual health context, men often do not have access to or use services although they behave in ways that put them and their partners at serious risk. It is essential that we work with men and boys to fully support and promote the SRHR of women, girls, boys and other men, and that health services address issues of power and proactively promote gender equality. Such services should help men to identify and address their own sexual and reproductive health needs and rights. This requires us to advance sexual rights, and to adopt a positive, human rights-based approach to everyone's sexuality.





**HIV and AIDS** : HIV and AIDS continues to devastate communities across the world. Gender inequalities and rigid gender roles exacerbate the spread and the impact of the epidemic, making it difficult for women and girls to negotiate sexual relations and leaving women and girls with the burden of caring for those with AIDS related illnesses. Definitions of masculinity that equate manhood with dominance over sexual partners, the pursuit of multiple partners and a willingness to take risks while simultaneously depicting health seeking behavior as a sign of weakness, increase the likelihood that men will contract and pass on the virus. Governments, UN agencies and civil society must take urgent action to implement evidence-based prevention, treatment, care and support strategies that address the gendered dimensions of HIV and AIDS, meet the needs of people living with HIV and AIDS, ensure access to treatment, challenge stigma and discrimination and support men to reduce their risk taking behaviors and improve their access to and use of HIV services.

**Youth** : Young men and women have a right to early and active involvement in initiatives that promote gender equality. Societies must create an environment where girls and boys are viewed as equals, enjoy dignified labour and easy access to quality education, and live lives free from violence, including forced marriage, are supported to create equitable relationships,

**Environment** : One result of harmful masculinities has been the attempt to dominate nature. With catastrophic climate change and laying the oceans, the forests, and land to waste, this quest has had disastrous outcomes. All levels of our societies must urgently act to reverse the damage done and facilitate the process of healing.

**Celebrating diversity** : We stress that debate, action and policies on gender relations and gender equities will have the most effective and positive impact when they include an understanding and celebrating of our differences based on race, ethnicity, age, sexual and gender diversities, religion, physical ability and class.

**Resources** : Resources allocated to women's equality must be increased. We seek not to divert resources from these initiatives but argue for the need to increase resources overall to achieve gender equality, including men and boys. .

**Strengthening the evidence base** : It is vital to continue to build the evidence base for gender transformative programs through research and program evaluations, to determine which strategies are most successful in different cultural contexts.



## **PART FOUR: THE CALL TO ACTION**

Individuals should take action within their communities and be agents of change to promote gender equality.

Community based organisations should continue their groundbreaking work to challenge the status quo of gender and other inequalities and actively model social change.

Non-governmental organisations should develop and build on programs, interventions and services that are based on the needs, rights and aspirations of their communities, are accountable and reflect the principles in this document. They should develop synergies with other relevant social movements, and establish mechanisms for monitoring and reporting on government commitments.

Governments should repeal all discriminatory laws and act on their existing international and UN obligations and commitments, prioritise and allocate resources to gender transformative interventions, and develop policies, frameworks and concrete implementation plans that advance this agenda, including through working with other governments and adherence to the Paris Principles.

Private sector should promote workplaces that are gender equitable and free from violence and exploitation, and direct their corporate social responsibility towards inclusive social change.

Media and Entertainment industries role in maintaining and reinforcing traditional and unequal gender norms has to be addressed, confronted and alternatives supported.

Donors should redirect their resources towards the promotion of inclusive programming for gender equality and inclusive social justice, including changes to laws and policies, and develop synergies amongst donors.

The United Nations must show leadership in these areas, innovatively and proactively support member states to promote gender equitable and socially transformative law, policy and practice, including through interagency coordination as articulated in the One UN approach.

We must invest in men and boys to become engaged in changing their behavior and attitudes towards gender equality supported by communities, systems and national policies.





Please send comments on this document to [menengage@menengage.org](mailto:menengage@menengage.org).

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