



UNW Study Guide
Topic: Modern Day Feminism
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Introduction:

What is feminism?

Feminism is both an intellectual commitment and a political movement that seeks justice for women and the end of sexism in all forms. Feminism refers to social, political, and economical equality among genders. It's about respecting diverse women's experiences, identities, knowledge, and strengths, and striving to empower all women to realize their full rights. It aims to combat inequalities and injustices related to women of multiple classes, races, and abilities and to understand the nature of gender inequality by examining women's social roles and lived experiences; feminist theorists have developed theories in a variety of disciplines to respond to issues concerning gender. Feminist political activists campaign in areas such as reproductive rights, domestic violence, fairness, social justice, right to vote, property ownership, education, and workplace issues such as family medical leave, equal pay, and sexual harassment and discrimination. Feminism is a combination of multiple socio-political movements and ideologies formed to give women a position the same as men in society and stand up against gender stereotypes. The concept of feminism reflects a history of different struggles, and the term has been interpreted in fuller and more complex ways as understanding has developed. In general, feminism can be seen as a movement to put an end to sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression and to achieve full gender equality in law and practice.

History of Feminism:

How did Feminism start and what does it advocate for?

Feminism began as a social, political, and cultural movement in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It emerged in response to a long history of inequality and discrimination faced by women and advocated for women's rights and equality with men in areas such as voting, property rights, and access to education and employment. The movement has evolved and there are many different branches and perspectives within feminism, but at its core, feminism is about fighting for gender equality and challenging patriarchal systems and societal norms that oppress women.

Feminism has a long and complex history, with roots dating back to the 18th and 19th centuries. Early feminist movements in the United States and Europe focused on gaining political rights for women, such as the right to vote, own property, and have access to education and jobs. These movements were led by women such as Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton in the United States and the suffragettes in the United Kingdom.

In the 1960s and 1970s, a new wave of feminism emerged, known as second-wave feminism. This movement was characterized by a more intersectional and diverse approach, and it sought to address issues such as reproductive rights, workplace discrimination, and domestic violence. This wave of feminism also saw the rise of consciousness-raising groups, where women would gather to share their experiences and discuss how sexism and misogyny affected their lives.

Third-wave feminism, which began in the 1990s and continues today, is more diverse and inclusive than previous waves, and it focuses on intersectionality, which is the idea that different forms of oppression, such as racism, sexism, and homophobia, are interconnected and cannot be separated. This wave also addresses issues such as body positivity and the representation of women in media.

Feminism advocates for the equality of women with men in all aspects of life, and it works to challenge and change the patriarchal systems, societal norms, and cultural representations that perpetuate inequality and discrimination against women. This can include fighting for equal pay and opportunities in the workplace, pushing for laws and policies that protect women from violence and discrimination, and challenging media portrayals that objectify and stereotype women.

Types of Feminism:

There are several different types of feminism, including liberal feminism, radical feminism, socialist feminism, cultural feminism, intersectional feminism, and postmodern feminism. Each type has its unique perspective on gender inequality and the role of feminism in addressing it. Liberal feminism focuses on achieving equality through individual rights and legal reform. Radical feminism sees patriarchal society as the root of women's oppression and calls for a radical restructuring of society. Socialist feminism emphasizes the role of capitalism in perpetuating gender inequality. Cultural feminism valorizes the "feminine" and aims to create a separate culture for women. Intersectional feminism takes into account how different forms of oppression, such as racism and classism, intersect and compound experiences of discrimination. Postmodern feminism is critical of the essentialist ideas of traditional feminism and emphasizes the fluidity of gender and the social construction of gender roles.

1. **Black feminism:** Black feminism is a philosophy centred around the condition of Black women—who experience oppression both based on race and sex—in patriarchal, white-dominated, capitalist western society. Largely ignored by the first and second feminist waves and early Black male-dominated liberation movements, Black women created their own space to discuss the unique oppression and discrimination affecting their everyday lives. The National Black Feminist Organization (NBFO) was formed in 1973 to ensure that the demands of mainstream civil rights groups would not overshadow their rights as autonomous human beings.
2. **Cultural feminism:** Cultural feminism refers to the separatist idea that women innately possess an evolved essence, which distinguishes them from men, giving them societal advantages that culture at large has historically qualified as weaknesses. Cultural feminists believe that a woman's perspective should receive more credence. Critics argue that cultural feminism relies too heavily on the "essentialist" tenets of society's gender binary.
3. **Ecofeminism:** Ecofeminism aligns the historical and present-day oppression of both women and the environment, arguing that patriarchal societies have used the same methods to dominate the planet's resources as they have to control women. Ecofeminists believe that respecting and prioritizing a healthy planet is integral to achieving true equality.
4. **Mainstream feminism:** Also known as "liberal feminism," this form mainly focuses on achieving women's rights and social justice through legal and political reform applied to existing social structures. Mainstream, liberal feminists focus on abortion rights, sexual harassment, affordable childcare, reproductive rights, and domestic violence.
5. **Marxist and socialist feminism:** Marxism is one of the direct influences for socialist feminists, who argue that capitalism was expressly designed to benefit patriarchal hierarchies and encourage the subordination of women. Socialist and Marxist feminism teaches that achieving gender equality will involve dismantling capitalist economic systems that exploit and undervalue women's labor.
6. **Multiracial feminism:** Multiracial feminism aims to educate people on how race influences gender constructions and oppression. Multiracial feminists offer feminist perspectives from marginalized groups such as Asian, Latina, and Black women.
7. **Radical feminism:** Radical feminists believe that society prioritizes the male experience and that gender roles are so far ingrained in every facet of modern life that true equality can only be achieved with a complete overhaul of the current societal system.

Current Issues:

#MeToo movement:

It is a movement started by socialists against rape, sexual abuse, harassment, and domestic violence in 2006. Victims of such abuses are encouraged to come forward and share their experiences publicly. The phrase "Me too" was first used by Tarzana Burke (a sexual assault survivor and an activist) on a social platform, MySpace. #MeToo began in 2017 which highlighted the problem further and helped the moment gain widespread attention.

According to WHO, one-third of all women worldwide have been a victim of sexual violence. Me too declare that victims of such abuses should suffer alone and be ashamed. It motivates people especially girls to be educated from a young age so that they are aware of their right to say no to sexual contact from any person. Me too moment highlights the concept of consent and calls out demeaning behavior. MeToo requires men to take a stand against behavior that objectifies women.

Social activists working for the victims of sexual violence have highlighted certain goals such as updating sexual harassment policies, instituting protocols that allow sufferers in all industries to file complaints without retaliation, and legislation should be passed that bans mandatory pre-employment agreements such as non-disclosure agreements that prevent an employee from talking about their employment publicly, or taking disputes (including sexual harassment claims) to arbitration rather than to legal proceedings, increasing managerial oversight; creating clear internal reporting mechanisms; more effective and proactive disciplinary measures; creating a culture that encourages employees to be open about serious problems; imposing financial penalties for companies that allow workers to remain in their position when they have repeatedly sexually harassed others; and forcing companies to pay huge fines or lose tax breaks if they decide to retain workers who are sexual harassers.

A lot of women often hesitate to come out publicly and share their experiences due to fear of their story being labeled as a false report. False reports are not that common, but when it happens, it is put in the spotlight for everyone to see. The me too movement has been heavily criticized due to false reports. The hashtag has been criticized for putting the responsibility of publicizing sexual harassment and abuse on those who experienced it, which could be re-traumatizing. The hashtag has been criticized as inspiring fatigue and outrage, rather than emotionally dense communication.

Many have pointed to a lack of representation of minority women in the #MeToo movement or its leadership. Most historical feminist movements have contained active elements of racism, and have typically ignored the needs of non-white women even though minority women are more likely to be targets of sexual harassment.

The #MeToo movement has been criticized for putting too much public focus on the consequences of specific individuals who have been accused of sexual misconduct, as opposed to discussing policies and changes to institutional norms that would help people currently experiencing sexual abuse. It's been noted that although allegations surrounding high-profile public figures tend to attract the most attention, the stories of regular workers often go unacknowledged.

The success of the Feminist Movement:

In 1893, Colorado becomes the first state to adopt an amendment granting women the right to vote. Utah and Idaho followed in 1896. In 1910, Washington state jumped on board, along with California in 1911, and Kansas, Oregon, and Arizona in 1912.

In 1903, The National Women's Trade Union League was formed to "assist in the organization of women wage workers into trade unions and thereby to help them secure conditions necessary for healthful and efficient work and to obtain a just reward for such work." The effort bonded women across economic and social divides, attracting "a coalition of working-class women, professional reformers, and women from wealthy and prominent families."

In 1916, women were granted access to birth control as the first family planning clinic opened in Brooklyn.

In 1963, Congress passed the Equal Pay Act, aimed at eradicating the pay gap between men and women.

In 1972, Title IX, now known as the Patsy Mink Equal Opportunity in Education Act, was authored. It brought greater educational opportunities to women. Title IX had an especially significant impact on American sports because it required high schools and colleges to provide equal opportunities for female athletes. The landmark legislation is credited with greatly increasing the participation of young women in sports.

Death of Mahsa Amini:

On September 16th, 2022, 22-year-old Mahsa Amini died. Three days earlier, she was arrested by Iran's so-called morality police for not wearing her hijab, a traditional Muslim face covering, by the regime's standards. Police claimed she had a heart attack, collapsed to the floor of a station, cracked her head, and fell into a coma. Women detained alongside Amini and other eyewitnesses, however, paint a different picture. They say she was badly beaten and, after her medical records were leaked, independent observers insist she died of severe trauma, cerebral hemorrhage, and stroke. Her death and the subsequent findings have led to massive protests across the country already deeply divided since the revolution of 1979 brought about the Islamic Republic of Iran. While Islamic traditionalists with a long and brutal track record of oppressing women work to maintain the status quo, much of its citizenry, with growing international support, has risen in dissent.

More than 12,000 people have been arrested and state-sponsored media reports 41 people have died, although independent sources place that figure as high as 240. The regime has shut down cell phone signals and throttled internet access in a response similar to the protest in 2019, where citizens took to the streets over a 200% spike in fuel prices. As many as 1500 people died during those protests and left the country even more angry, divided, and repressed. It's a particularly troublesome time for women in the country.

So the Islamic Republic of Iran is a deeply ideological regime. It justifies itself based on a particular politicized and conservative interpretation of Islam. And because it's an ideological regime, like other ideological authoritarian systems, the regime in the state apparatus believes that they have a moral obligation to uphold a particular standard of conduct in society. And so they've trusted these security forces to observe citizens' behavior, which is, let's be clear, it's overwhelmingly women's behavior. Men's behavior doesn't factor into monitoring and control, and they seek to punish, arrest, lecture, and educate — and educate in quotes here, because one of the things that happens often if you're arrested by the morality police, is you're instructed on why you're arrested. And often for women, it's because they

haven't been wearing the veil or the hijab properly. And then they are sometimes subjected to mandatory educational classes that are not that different from what we would see in other authoritarian regimes. Her name will go down in history and is synonymous with the struggle for women's rights, and the struggle for democracy. You know, now there are all these photos, artwork, and songs that are being produced within the last week remembering her and inspiring, you know, civil society in Iran to continue to resist this repressive regime

Religious Contradictions:

There are some religious beliefs and practices that may be seen as contradictory to the principles of feminism, such as the belief in male-only leadership or the subjugation of women. However, it is important to note that not all religious individuals or groups subscribe to these views, and many religious feminists work to reconcile their faith with feminist principles. Additionally, different interpretations of religious texts can lead to different conclusions regarding the role of women in society and religious practice.

Feminism is a movement that advocates for the rights and equality of women and challenges societal norms and expectations that discriminate against or marginalize women. Some religious beliefs and practices, however, have been used to justify the subjugation of women and to deny them equal rights and opportunities.

For example, some interpretations of the Bible and the Quran suggest that men are spiritual leaders and heads of households and that women should submit to men. In some religious traditions, women are not allowed to hold certain positions of authority, such as becoming priests or imams.

On the other hand, many religious feminists argue that their faith can be interpreted in a way that supports gender equality and women's rights. They point to texts and traditions within their faith that promote justice and equality and work to challenge patriarchal interpretations and practices. In addition, some religious communities have taken steps to address issues of gender inequality, such as ordaining women as priests or allowing women to hold positions of authority.

Overall, the relationship between feminism and religion is complex and multifaceted and will depend on individual beliefs and practices within a given religion. Some religious individuals and communities may be actively working to challenge patriarchal norms, while others may be more resistant to feminist ideas and principles.

Controversies around the world regarding feminism:

Feminism is a social, political, and cultural movement that aims to advance the rights and status of women. The movement has a long history, with different waves and branches that have emerged over time. As a result, there is a wide range of opinions and beliefs within the feminist movement, which can lead to controversies and debates.

One major controversy within feminism is the debate over intersectionality, which is the idea that different forms of oppression, such as racism, classism, and homophobia, intersect and overlap. Some feminists argue that the movement should focus on intersectionality, while others believe that it detracts from the main goal of advancing women's rights.

Another controversy is the debate over the goals and tactics of the feminist movement. Some feminists advocate for a more radical approach, such as pushing for a complete overthrow of patriarchal systems,

while others believe in a more gradual and pragmatic approach, such as working within existing systems to make incremental changes.

There are also debates within the movement over the representation of certain groups of women. For example, some feminists argue that the movement has not done enough to address the specific issues faced by women of color, while others argue that the movement has been too focused on the concerns of white, middle-class women.

Additionally, there are ongoing debates over issues such as reproductive rights, the gender pay gap, and the representation of women in politics and media. Some people argue that feminism is no longer necessary, while others argue that it is more important than ever, as there are still significant inequalities between men and women in many areas of society.

The controversies around feminism vary around the world, some countries have different cultural and social norms that lead to a different understanding of the movement.

Views by Liberalists:

Feminism highlights women's rights in countless areas but this real fight for women's rights is mixed up with a lot of nonsense "empowerment" that has more to do with personal gain than having a real impact on policies that affect women. Feminism has transformed from a social and political movement of the 19th and 20th Centuries into a trendy cultural identity in the 21st Century, leaving it open to exploitation by capitalists who often misuse it to promote their campaigns. For example, Procter Gamble, which makes many products bought by women, gives the majority of its political contributions to republicans who oppose women's reproductive rights. The same is true of McAndrews & Forbes, the parent company of Revlon Cosmetics, which despite its breast cancer awareness initiatives and various women's philanthropy, was founded by men, continues to be run primarily by men, and gives the majority of its campaign contributions to extreme conservative anti-choice candidates. Their fundraising for breast and ovarian cancer research is nothing more than a marketing tool.

Millennial feminism has been heavily characterized by its concern with beauty standards and the constant scrutiny of women's bodies in pop culture which has dehumanized all women. This is a worthy concern. The self-esteem of girls and women plays a central role in whether or not we will succeed in a world that has been built to discriminate against us. But in the process of trying to dismantle harmful standards and challenge the very resilient egocentric patriarchal power structure, we have succumbed to something else; that is, a shiny brand of feminism that is defined by consumerism and focuses so obsessively on beauty standards.

Millennial feminists, instead of fighting for genuine causes e.g domestic violence, and sexual harassment, have started focusing on baseless areas such as wearing shorter clothes, drinking, and smoking which go against basic modesty and decency and deviate the focus from real issues.

Millennial feminist ideology focuses more on demonizing men than empowering women. It negates male masculinity and promotes female masculinity. Use Hashtags like 'KillAllMen' and 'YesAllMen' and sexist like "manspreading" and "mansplaining" is common in gen Z feminism. The fight for women's rights is turning into a fight against men and women.

An example of a white millennial feminist argument would be, "Muslim women should not wear burqas or hijabs because they are oppressive!" which is simply hypocritical because, on one hand, these feminists fight for women's right to dress the way they want and then go around humiliating and judging them for what they choose to wear.

Leftists:

In politics, the word *left* is applied to people and groups that have liberal views. That generally means they support progressive reforms, especially those seeking greater social and economic equality. Leftists generally support feminist ideas and principles, such as the idea that women should have the same rights and opportunities as men. They often advocate for policies and initiatives aimed at achieving gender equality, such as equal pay for equal work and ending discrimination against women in the workplace. Leftists may also support intersectional feminism, which recognizes that women of different races, ethnicities, sexual orientations, and socioeconomic backgrounds may face unique forms of oppression and discrimination. However, there can be different views and opinions among leftists about specific feminist issues and strategies for achieving gender equality.

Leftists view feminism as a necessary and integral part of their broader political and social ideologies. They see gender inequality as a fundamental aspect of the capitalist system and other forms of oppression, such as racism and classism, and argue that true equality cannot be achieved without addressing these issues together.

Intersectional feminism is particularly important to leftists, as it acknowledges that women experience oppression in multiple and interconnected ways and that these experiences are shaped by factors such as race, class, sexuality, and ability. Leftists argue that it is important to consider these intersections to fully understand and address how women are oppressed and that a failure to do so can lead to the marginalization of certain groups of women.

Leftists often advocate for policies such as affordable childcare, paid parental leave, and affordable healthcare, which would help to address the disproportionate burden of care work that falls on women. They also support policies such as equal pay for equal work, affirmative action, and ending discrimination in the workplace, which would help to address the systemic economic inequality faced by women.

Leftists also support reproductive rights, such as the right to access safe and legal abortion. They argue that women's autonomy over their bodies is essential to achieving true gender equality and that restricting access to reproductive healthcare is a form of oppression.

It is important to note that there are different kinds of leftist ideologies, and so some may have different priorities and strategies when it comes to feminism. But overall, leftists view feminism as a crucial aspect of achieving a more just and equal society.

Conservatives:

Conservatives are individuals or groups who hold traditional views on social, economic, and political issues, and often align with the Republican Party in the United States. They tend to be opposed to progressive or liberal policies and movements, such as feminism. Many conservatives believe in limited government intervention, a strong national defense, and traditional family values. Some conservatives may see feminism as a threat to these values and believe that it promotes an ideology that undermines the traditional roles of men and women in society. However, not all conservatives hold these views and some may support some feminist ideas, like equal pay for equal work, but have a different approach to how to achieve that goal.

Conservatives have a range of views on feminism, but many tend to be critical of the movement. Some conservatives believe that feminism is a political ideology that is hostile to traditional values and undermines the role of men and women in society. They may argue that feminism is not necessary for

today's society because women already have equal rights and opportunities, and that it is harmful to traditional family structures and gender roles.

Some conservatives also argue that feminism is an example of political correctness and that it promotes ideas that are at odds with common sense and traditional morality. They may point out that many feminist ideas, such as gender quotas in workplaces, are unfair to men and may be harmful to society. Other conservatives may take a more nuanced view, acknowledging that women have historically faced discrimination, but disagree with certain feminist views, such as the idea that gender is a social construct and that biology has no role in determining gender roles. They may also disagree with certain feminist policies, such as affirmative action, which they believe are unfair to men.

It is important to note that not all conservatives hold these views and some may be supportive of feminist ideas like equal pay for equal work and workplace discrimination. And also, not all feminists have the same views, it is a diverse movement with different perspectives and ideas.

Past UN actions:

Women's rights have been at the heart of a series of international conferences that have produced significant political commitments to women's human rights and equality. Starting in 1975, which was also International Women's Year, Mexico City hosted the World Conference on the International Women's Year, which resulted in the World Plan of Action and the designation of 1975–1985 as the United Nations Decade for Women. In 1980, another international conference on women was held in Copenhagen and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women was opened for signature. The third World Conference on Women was held in Nairobi, with the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women has begun its work in 1982. These three world conferences witnessed extraordinary activism on the part of women from around the world and laid the groundwork for world conferences in the 1990s to address women's rights, including the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995 (see below). In addition, the rights of women belonging to particular groups, such as older women, ethnic minority women, or women with disabilities, have been also addressed in various other international policy documents such as the International Plans of Action on Ageing (Vienna, 1982 and Madrid, 2002), the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action (2001) and the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons (1982).

VIENNA DECLARATION AND PROGRAMME OF ACTION

In 1993, the World Conference on Human Rights was held in Vienna. It sought to review the status of the human rights machinery in place at the time. Women's rights activists mobilized to ensure that women's human rights were fully on the agenda of the international community under the rallying cry "Women's Rights are Human Rights." Particularly around the issue of violence against women, civil society activists organized tribunals to put the spotlight on violations of women's rights, previously unaddressed because they were considered part of the private sphere, taboo, or simply accepted as an inevitable part of women's lives. The Conference was successful in adopting the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, which stated that "the human rights of women and the girl-child are an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights" (para. 18) and placed particularly heavy emphasis on eliminating all forms of gender-based violence. Importantly, the Programme of Action also called for "the eradication of any conflicts which may arise between the rights of women and the harmful effects of certain traditional or customary practices, cultural prejudices, and religious extremism" (para. 38).

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT

The International Conference on Population and Development, which was held in 1994, represented a milestone for women's rights. While the Conference was focused on population issues, the delegates meeting in Cairo agreed that population was not only about demographics but, more importantly, about people. The issues taken up in its Programme of Action⁵ are fundamentally related to women's human rights, including gender equality, the family, reproductive health, birth control, and family planning, women's health, as well as immigration and education of women. Importantly, the Programme of Action is explicitly grounded in human rights and proclaims that "advancing gender equality and equity and the empowerment of women, and the elimination of all kinds of violence against women, and ensuring women's ability to control their fertility, are cornerstones of population and development-related programs." The Conference was also important for its clear statement of reproductive rights, explaining that these "rest on the recognition of the basic right of all couples and individuals to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing and timing of their children and to have the information and means to do so, and the right to attain the highest standard of sexual and reproductive health. It also includes their right to make decisions concerning reproduction free of discrimination, coercion, and violence, as expressed in human rights documents." The Programme of Action sets specific targets for the provision of universal education; the reduction of infant, child, and maternal mortality; and ensuring universal access to reproductive health care, including family planning, assisted childbirth, and prevention of sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS, by 2015. Follow-up conferences have been organized to assess progress towards these goals, and inequality and lack of accountability constitute ongoing challenges to their achievement.

BEIJING DECLARATION AND PLATFORM FOR ACTION

Adopted during the Fourth World Conference on Women in September 1995, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action focused on 12 areas concerning the implementation of women's human rights and set out an agenda for women's empowerment. It builds on the results of the previous three world conferences on women but is considered a significant achievement in explicitly articulating women's rights as human rights. The Platform for Action includes a series of strategic objectives to eliminate discrimination against women and achieve equality between women and men. It involves political and legal strategies on a global scale based on a human rights framework. The Platform for Action is the most comprehensive expression of States' commitments to the human rights of women. Subsequent reviews of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action have revealed that although significant progress has been made in some areas of women's human rights, "discriminatory legislation, as well as harmful traditional and customary practices and negative stereotyping of women and men, persist", particularly in family, civil, penal, labor and commercial laws or codes, or administrative rules and regulations.⁷ Both the 2005 and the 2010 reviews of the Platform concluded that *de jure* and *de facto* equality had not been achieved in any country in the world and the 2010 review recognized that even where legal reforms had taken place, they were often ineffectively enforced.

MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

In 2000, the international community agreed to eight time-bound development goals to be achieved by 2015, including a goal on gender equality and the empowerment of women, as well as one on the reduction of maternal mortality. Seven of the Goals have specific targets to measure progress. Although they have shortcomings from a human rights perspective, the Millennium Development Goals are an important political commitment that has galvanized international support for some of the world's most daunting problems.

Concerning women's rights, Millennium Development Goal 3 is to promote gender equality and empower women. However, its corresponding target relates only to eliminating gender disparities in education by 2015. While girls' access to education is imperative for achieving gender equality, this narrow target is

insufficient for measuring progress in achieving gender equality and empowering women. Goal 3 also includes indicators on the share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector and national parliaments, but these do not have benchmarks or deadlines. Critical issues such as violence against women and discriminatory laws are not addressed. Millennium Development Goal 5 aims to reduce the maternal mortality ratio by three quarters, between 1990 and 2015. Unfortunately, at the 2010 High-level Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly on the Millennium Development Goals, it was revealed to be the most off-track of all of the Goals, even though the knowledge and the tools are available to make pregnancy and childbirth a safe experience for women. In 2010, the Secretary-General launched the Global Strategy for Women's and Children's Health, setting out key actions to improve the health of women and children worldwide. Integrating human rights and gender equality throughout the Millennium Development Goals and in the post-2015 development agenda is key to achieving meaningful progress.

UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development ("Rio+20") brought Heads of State and Government to Brazil in 2012, to appraise progress in the implementation of agreements struck since the landmark 1992 United Nations Conference on the Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro. At "Rio+20", countries renewed their political commitment to sustainable development, agreed to establish a set of sustainable development goals, and established a high-level political forum on sustainable development. Importantly, the outcome document, entitled "The future we want",⁹ also reaffirms the commitments of States to "women's equal rights, access and opportunities for participation and leadership in the economy, society and political decision-making" and includes explicit references to accelerating the implementation of commitments in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Beijing Platform for Action and the Millennium Declaration. The outcome document also states that "gender equality and the effective participation of women are important for effective action on all aspects of sustainable development" and calls for the repeal of discriminatory laws and for ensuring women's equal access to justice.

THE HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL AND ITS MECHANISMS

The Human Rights Council is the main intergovernmental body of the United Nations to promote and protect human rights. With 47 States elected by the General Assembly, the Human Rights Council has regularly held special panels on women's rights and the integration of a gender perspective since its creation in 2006. There are also many resolutions by the Council and its predecessor, the Commission on Human Rights, that call on States to implement their obligations relating to women's rights. These discussions and resolutions are important to keep women's rights on the international agenda. The Human Rights Council also has the power to call special sessions to address human rights violations and emergencies. These special sessions have, in some cases, presented opportunities for examining violations of women's rights. For instance, the special session on Darfur, Sudan, led to a report of the High-level Mission on the situation of human rights therein which specific concerns were raised about rape and sexual violence, and the lack of access to justice for these crimes (A/HRC/4/80, para. 39). The special session on the Democratic Republic of the Congo also led to reports on the situation there which expressed particular concern about sexual violence and gender inequality (A/HRC/10/59, paras. 35–42, and A/HRC/13/63, paras. 26–34). Furthermore, the Human Rights Council recently established Commissions of Inquiry for Libya and the Syrian Arab Republic, to investigate the violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law by all parties to the conflict that has taken place there during civil strife starting in both countries in 2011. Many commissions of inquiry involve an expert on sexual and gender-based violence, and their reports include findings on gender-based violence and recommendations on gender aspects of accountability and transitional justice (A/HRC/19/68 and A/HRC/19/69). The universal periodic review (UPR), a procedure established at the creation of the Council, also presents important opportunities for assessing States' compliance with their international

obligations related to the human rights of women. Under this mechanism, the human rights situation in all United Nations Member States is reviewed every four and a half years. Women's rights are among the most frequently raised issues in the UPR recommendations. Special procedures mandate holders are appointed by the Human Rights Council to examine particular thematic issues or the human rights situation in a certain country.¹⁰ They undertake thematic research, conduct country missions, engage in dialogue with Governments about individual cases or broader structural concerns, engage in advocacy, and contribute to the development of international human rights law. Certain special procedures mandates are specifically concerned with women's rights, such as the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children, and the Working Group on the issue of discrimination against women in law and practice. Other mandates have devoted attention to women's rights and gender in their work, particularly in undertaking thematic research on women and specific human rights, ensuring attention to women's rights in their country visits, and communicating with Governments on specific cases of alleged violations of women's human rights. The work of special procedures mandates holders helps to improve understanding of international human rights law, reflecting evolving interpretations to better take account of women's experience and denials of their human rights. Various examples of these contributions are highlighted below.

THE SECURITY COUNCIL

The United Nations Security Council has adopted a series of resolutions specifically relating to women, peace, and security. In 2000, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 1325, calling for increased participation of women in all aspects of conflict prevention and resolution and a gender perspective in all United Nations peace and security efforts, as well as in the negotiation and implementation of peace agreements. Resolution 1325 (2000) and subsequent Security Council resolutions and United Nations Secretary-General reports on the same topic also call on all parties to conflicts to take special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence in the context of armed conflict, while at the same time recognizing women's important role in peace processes as agents of change.

THE COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

The Commission on the Status of Women was established by United Nations Economic and Social Council resolution 2/11 in 1946 "to prepare recommendations and reports to the [Council] on promoting women's rights in political, economic, civil, social, and educational fields". The Commission is also mandated to make recommendations to the Council on "urgent problems requiring immediate attention in the field of women's rights". The Commission meets once a year and issues agreed conclusions on priority themes set for each year. The agreed conclusions include an assessment of progress, gaps, and challenges, as well as concrete recommendations addressed to Governments, international organizations, civil society, and other stakeholders. The Commission also adopts resolutions on a variety of women's rights-related issues. Throughout its history, the Commission has played a key role in promoting women's rights, actively contributing to landmark international legal and policy instruments, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

Questions a resolution must answer?

How can women of backward areas, who do not have access to media, be made aware of their rights and be motivated to fight against violence?

How can the UN make sure that issues of women of all ethnicities are addressed instead of only the dominant ones?

How can it be ensured that money collected through campaigns that advertise the fight for women's rights is put to the right use?

How can hypocrisy by individuals that call themselves feminists but promote anti-feminist campaigns be combated?

How can it be made sure that cases of abuse that come forward are not false or made up?

Ways to make sure feminism campaigns do not deviate from the main cause which is highlighting issues that women around the world face towards personal gains.

Is millennial feminism a fight for women's rights or a fight against men?

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