



Milestones

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Milestone agreement at UN gender equality talks

After two weeks of negotiations in New York in March 2014, the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) ended with an agreement calling for accelerated progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and confirming the need for a stand-alone goal on gender equality and women's empowerment in the set of international targets that will be introduced once the MDGs expire in 2015.

It was also the first time that a document has been produced that can be used to push the mainstreaming of gender equality into sustainable development goals, currently under negotiation.

Concerns regarding the possible dilution of women's rights during the process of negotiation were reduced with the withdrawal of the sovereignty clause, being lobbied for by certain countries, which would have allowed governments to ignore recommendations

interfering with their own traditions and practices.

Women's sexual and reproductive health and rights find specific reference in the document: the elimination of harmful practices, including child marriage and female genital mutilation, which, significantly, would in future not be referred to as "cutting"; the right to access abortion services and the development of sex education programmes for young people. The document calls for the elimination and prevention of violence and for the prosecution of perpetrators.

It also calls on governments to address discriminatory social practices, laws and beliefs that undermine gender equality. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, the executive director of UN Women, said the agreement represented "a milestone toward a transformative global development agenda that puts the empowerment of women and girls at its centre".