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**OUR COMMITMENT
TO WOMEN'S RIGHTS**

WOMEN'S RIGHTS ARE UNDER THREAT

In the past year there has been a huge shift in the political landscape around the world, including Europe and the US.

We are seeing growing signs that hard fought progress on women's rights is in danger of being rolled back.

In Bangladesh, there are currently attempts to row back on legal protections so girls under 18 can be married to preserve their family's so-called 'honour'. Russia recently voted to decriminalise domestic violence, putting countless women and girls at risk. In the U.S. the reinstatement of the 'Global Gag Rule' is a direct attack on women's sexual and reproductive health rights around the world and will affect the poorest women the most.

There is now a global urgency for campaigners and organisations like ActionAid to defend the rights of women and girls to ensure they are advanced, not eroded.

The recent Women's Marches in cities and communities around the world were a huge, global shout on behalf of women's rights. In these changing times it is inspiring to see so many people from all walks of life come together to stand in solidarity and make their voices heard. But now we must take the next step.

This is not the time to go back to normal – it is the time to get involved, and stay involved, in the worldwide fight for women's rights.

HOW ACTIONAID IS STANDING UP FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS

ActionAid will always stand up for the rights of women and girls living in poverty, wherever they are. Our work across the world is founded on values of equality, solidarity and tolerance, and we do not believe in being silent when we see these values under threat.

ActionAid fights for the women and girls living in the world's poorest places and supporting them as they challenge the root causes of poverty and injustice. We support women and girls in 45 countries as they claim their rights, challenge laws which prevent them from owning land, and push to end harmful practices like female genital mutilation. ActionAid invests in women's groups, farming cooperatives to grow and sell food, and women's watch groups to report and take on violence against women and girls. **We support women and girls as they lead their communities out of poverty as the most effective way of changing lives for good.**

ActionAid UK is an organisation made up of people of all nationalities, races, genders, sexual orientations, ages and religions. This diversity is our strength.

This document sets out ActionAid UK's continued commitment in the global struggle for women's rights.

Cover photo: Cynthia Ayivor (with her daughter) reports and tackles violence against women and girls through an ActionAid community team in rural Ghana.

Shilpy (centre) leads a women's group campaigning for workers' rights and equal pay in Bangladesh. ActionAid training has helped them negotiate for better conditions.



Photo: Nicola Bailey/ActionAid

1. ACTIONAID UK WILL CONTINUE TO SUPPORT GRASSROOTS WOMEN'S RIGHTS GROUPS AROUND THE WORLD ON THE FRONTLINE OF CHANGE

Women's rights organisations are the lynchpin of the struggle for gender equality. For decades they have fought on the frontline to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls, fought for sexual and reproductive rights, challenged wage inequality, and pushed for better representation of women and girls in every aspect of our lives.

Women's rights organisations work at community level to challenge harmful social norms, provide essential support services to survivors of violence, and support the empowerment of

women economically and politically. From local to global level, they work together to push for policy change and reforms in legislation, they monitor the implementation of laws, and they challenge and hold governments accountable. Without these women leading the way, we will not achieve gender equality.

But these women's organisations are chronically underfunded – with an average income of \$20,000 per year and only receiving 1.5% of aid money committed to gender equality worldwide.¹

Through its work with some of the world's poorest and most marginalised communities, we see first hand the incredible impact of grassroots organisations and the fearless women leading them.

ActionAid will continue to advocate for more funds for women's rights organisations and movements – especially at a time when women's rights are under attack globally.



Gladys (right) at school in a remote region of northern Kenya. Forced to undergo female genital mutilation, she escaped child marriage with ActionAid's support.

Photo: Jennifer Huxta/ActionAid

2. ACTIONAID UK WILL CONTINUE TO CHALLENGE HARMFUL SOCIAL NORMS WHICH PERPETUATE GENDER INEQUALITY AND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

Violence against women and girls is one of the most widespread and insidious human rights abuses, affecting one in three women and girls globally. It is a manifestation of deeply entrenched gender norms and inequalities, used to maintain and reinforce male power by controlling women's bodies, freedoms and opportunities.


Violence against women and girls happens in every country, culture, religion and socio-economic group, both in times of peace and conflict. Women living in poverty, disabled women,

LGBTI and migrant women, those of young or old age, and those living with HIV/AIDS are often more at risk.

While there has been remarkable progress over the last four decades towards recognising and addressing this – not least through the hard-fought campaigning by women's rights organisations – levels of violence remain unacceptably high.

Grassroots women's rights organisations understand the specific issues in their communities which hold women and girls back, and understand attitudes which allow for the acceptance of violence against women and girls.

ActionAid will continue to work with these grassroots women's organisations as they fight to end violence and gender inequality at its root.



With ActionAid's support, Everline escaped her abusive husband and set up a successful tea and chapatti business in East Pokot, Kenya.

Photo: Jennifer Huxta/ActionAid

3. ACTIONAID UK WILL CONTINUE TO CHALLENGE UNFAIR ECONOMIC SYSTEMS THAT IMPACT WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' RIGHTS

Women's economic inequality is one of the most harmful examples of inequality in the world today. The scale and depth of economic inequality faced by women – particularly in countries in the global South – is staggering. In the world of work, for instance, women's labour force participation has stagnated globally since the 1990s² – 700 million fewer women than men of working age were in paid employment in 2016.³ The majority of working women are employed in informal, precarious and part-time roles, where they are often denied secure contracts, social protection, or rights to organise for better conditions.⁴ And a vastly disproportionate amount of unpaid care work is undertaken by women, further hindering the fulfilment of their economic rights.

Gender discrimination in labour markets means that women often end up in the lowest paid roles in sectors stereotyped as 'feminine', such as garment manufacturing and domestic work.⁵ It is therefore no surprise that the gender gap in wages remains stubbornly large. Women earn on

average 24% less than men globally,⁶ a figure that rises to 33% in South Asia.⁷

Progress on women's economic rights has gone into reverse. In 2016, the World Economic Forum (WEF) reported that the gap between women's and men's economic participation and opportunity across 144 countries had increased to 44% - the highest gap since 2008.⁸ WEF also identified a 77% gap in women's political participation.⁹ These findings point firmly to the relationship between women's lack of voice in decision-making at all levels and the wider social, economic and political discrimination that they face.¹⁰

Decision-makers are not taking notice of the ways in which violence, women's economic exploitation, and the systems that encourage this oppression reinforce each other in a vicious cycle.¹¹ The result is that not enough is being done to address the root causes of both violence and economic inequality. This means that policies to address violence on the one hand, and those aimed at promoting women's economic empowerment on the other, are destined to fall short.

ActionAid commits to challenging harmful economic structures and their patriarchal roots. Our programmes will continue to empower women and girls so that they are better able to overcome the violence and discrimination they experience.



Local women lead ActionAid's earthquake response in Panga, Nepal, alongside Women's Rights Officer Malati (centre).

Photo: Srikanth Kolari/ActionAid

4. ACTIONAID UK WILL CONTINUE TO COMMIT TO A WOMEN-LED RESPONSE TO HUMANITARIAN CRISES

The number of disasters in the world is growing every year.¹² There are now more refugees in the world than there have been since the Second World War. At the end of 2015, there were 65.3 million forcibly displaced people worldwide.¹³ The UN projects that in 2017, at least 96.2 million people will be targeted for humanitarian aid.¹⁴

All forms of violence against women and girls tend to increase during humanitarian crises.¹⁵ Many women and girls who have experienced

sexual violence during displacement, increased domestic violence as a result of the stresses of long-term insecurity, or have been forced into marriage to reduce the number of mouths to feed, have not had support or shelter.

ActionAid will continue to push for a global understanding of what is needed to deliver services to women and girls in humanitarian crises.

Too often, women's and girls' voices are not heard during crises. ActionAid will support a push for women and girls to be leaders in humanitarian response work, to raise their voices and demand that they are listened to. And we will support grassroots women's rights organisations – who are best placed to deliver effective, culturally sensitive services in emergencies – to be at the forefront of humanitarian response.



Former bonded labourer, Sushma Tharu, with her sons Bikas and Birendra. She works to free other women by making them aware of their rights.

Photo: Nayantara Gurung Kakshapati/ActionAid

5. ACTIONAID UK WILL CONTINUE TO PROMOTE WOMEN AND GIRLS ACCESS TO JUSTICE

ActionAid has worked for many years to promote access to justice when women and girls face violence or economic injustice. We have engaged with governments to expand women's and girls' legal rights, and have supported women's organisations to realise the full implementation of the rights that already exist on paper but are rarely upheld.

ActionAid will continue to support women and girls across the world to demand

justice and lobby for justice systems that work for women. We will continue to raise awareness about the laws that exist to protect women's rights and reduce the stigma around reporting violations. We will continue to work to bring about pro-women government policies, judicial system reform and changes in social norms and practices at national, local and community levels. From access to land, to sexual violence in conflict, to denial of inheritance, to prosecution for multiple forms of physical or sexual violence – ActionAid's programming will support women and girls to access legal redress.¹⁶

ActionAid UK's work on women's and girls' rights is more important than ever. We must stand together to protect hard-won women's rights and challenge the root causes of injustice.

This is not the time to go back to normal – it is the time to get involved, and stay involved, in the worldwide fight for women's rights.

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March 2017

ActionAid is a charitable company limited by guarantee and registered in England and Wales (Company number 01295174). England and Wales charity number 274467, Scottish charity number SC045476. Registered Office 33-39 Bowling Green Lane, London EC1R 0BJ.

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