



## **OCIC Gender Equality Hub Statement on International Human Rights Day**

**December 10, 2020**

This year's commemoration of [International Human Rights Day](#) is like no other. All over the world, we are facing a pandemic that is causing loss of lives, livelihoods, and human dignity and that is widening the inequalities that pervade our already fragmented world. As nations work to rebuild from the impacts of COVID-19, it is imperative now, more than ever, that the voices of the vulnerable and marginalized be heard.

Today, the organizational and individual members of the [Gender Equality Hub](#) of the [Ontario Council for International Cooperation](#), amplify the voices of women and girls through a virtual gathering "[Voices from the Grassroots: COVID-19 and Women from the Global South](#)". This event is one of the outcomes of a project that began at the height of the pandemic with the aim of creating a space for women and girls from grassroots communities in the Global South to share their experiences with the world on how the COVID-19 health crisis has affected their lives. Women and girls from Afghanistan, Guatemala, Kenya, Mali, the Philippines, South Sudan, and Uganda have spoken of their challenges, resilience, and gaps which can be filled with the support of development actors.

Today, through a virtual breakfast event hosted by the OCIC Gender Equality Hub, we were privileged to hear directly from these grassroots voices. We heard from Carmen Zubiaga, a woman living with a disability and a disability rights advocate based in the Philippines. She shared the unique challenges that persons with disabilities face during COVID-19. We heard from Carolyn Drileba, a 14-year-old girl from South Sudan currently living in Uganda, who shared her struggles, resilience, and hope. Carolyn is currently continuing her education while simultaneously assisting her mother in caring for her nine siblings. She is working and earning approximately CAD50 over a four-month period. We also heard the observations and reflections of Najia Zewari, a Canadian-Afghan, who recently returned to her home country during the pandemic.

In our broader project, the women and girls from the seven countries shared the impact of increased debt loads, job and income loss, heightened levels of gender violence and assault, especially amongst young girls, increased crime amongst youth boys, food insecurity and hunger, transportation challenges, civil unrest, unresponsive and inconsistent governments, exacerbation of inequality and discrimination, especially for persons with disabilities, as well as increased mental stress. Their experiences echo those of women, girls, and other vulnerable and marginalized groups across the world, including in Canada.



In all these stories, a common theme has emerged and resonated: **COVID-19 continues to magnify and exacerbate existing gender inequalities, making the marginalized even more vulnerable.**

We take this opportunity today, in solidarity with our vulnerable and marginalized sisters and mothers from everywhere in the world, especially in regions torn apart by conflict, social and economic crises, to remind everyone that **gender equality and women's rights are human rights. The realization of these human rights for all remains central to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.**

Through this project, we hope to create greater awareness, make funds more accessible, strengthen partnerships with and build the capacity of grassroots women's groups, initiate and sustain collaborations between multi-sectoral actors (governments, private sector, civil society, diaspora groups, religious organizations, the academe, media, etc.), as well as strengthen accountability mechanisms at all levels—in country, regional, and global spaces.

On Human Rights Day, we call on each of us to:

1. [Share the stories of these women and girls](#) in your networks, spaces, and spheres of influence
2. Sustain your engagement in gender equality and human rights issues
3. Consider contributing financially this month to a local or global family in need, or to support a grassroots women's organization in any of these countries: Afghanistan, Guatemala, Kenya, Mali, the Philippines, South Sudan, and Uganda. If you would like OCIC to facilitate this, you can donate [here](#).

In solidarity,

OCIC Gender Equality Hub