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## **WORLD: ‘War on Women’ needs forceful response, not glib statements**

**‘War on Women’ needs forceful response, not glib statements**

By Shada Islam

EU Observer (06.07.2022) – <https://bit.ly/3o9l20a> – Across the world, women’s rights are under assault. This global war on

women demands urgent international attention – and a forceful collective response.

Feel-good tick box references to gender equality of the kind made in last week's long-winded and largely unreadable official G7 and Nato statements are not enough.

Twenty-five years after the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, not a single UN member has achieved gender equality.

Discrimination based on gender is happening in democracies and autocracies, in secular societies and religious ones, in rich and poor nations.

Orientalist and Islamophobic tropes notwithstanding, it is not just a problem “over there” in the Global South and in Muslim majority states. It is also a blight on the face of too many Western democracies.

The US Supreme Court's decision to overturn Roe v Wade, the 1973 landmark case protecting women's right to abortion, is a case in point.

And because what happens in America does not stay in America, there are fears the ruling is likely to [embolden anti-abortion movements worldwide, including in Europe.](#)

Some modest headway in recognising the unrelenting tide of discrimination and violence facing women worldwide was made at last week's [largely self-congratulatory and mostly irrelevant G7 talk fest](#).

The group's mention of the many challenges and structural barriers facing women and the call for a gender-equal global economic recovery are a "step in the right direction", says the [Gender and Development Network](#).

The G7 did commit to ensuring women's sexual and reproductive health and rights.

But meeting only days after the US Supreme Court decision, neither US president Joe Biden nor any of the other six leaders – joined by the only woman participant, EU Commission president Ursula Von der Leyen – mentioned the right to abortion.

Even the tough-talking hard security-wired Nato summit, which had 11 women leaders in attendance, managed only a passing reference to the UN's under-implemented and under-funded Women, Peace and Security agenda and the Alliance's work to "incorporate gender perspectives across the organisation".

Let's be generous and say these are good beginnings.

But let's also be honest and say this is cursory, complacent lip service.

The onus is now on Indonesia as the current G20 chair to make sure that gender equality really gets the priority attention it deserves at the [summit in Bali in November](#).

### **The unnoticed 'care economy'**

That means backing up noble intentions with real action on funding and investment in the [care economy](#), a commitment to ensure women's reproductive health and making sure that women do not bear the brunt of the looming global economic slowdown.

Escalating levels of global inequality are eroding fragile but hard-won gains on gender inequality and it is women – particularly those who face multiple and escalating forms of intersectionality – who have been hit hardest.

Even today, the pandemic continues to [impact women and girls disproportionately](#) and this will remain the case amid looming food insecurity, increased energy prices and high levels of inflation.

Russia's war in Ukraine means that Ukrainian women have now joined the ranks of millions more who have suffered the unrelenting human costs of armed conflict from [Syria to Yemen and Afghanistan](#) and far beyond.

Sexual violence as a tactic of war, terrorism and political

repression is on the rise, [warns UN Women](#).

Afghan women and girls risk facing an even darker future unless there is a [“more concerted international effort”](#) to push the Taliban to respect women’s rights.

To be effective, however, those putting the pressure on the Taliban must put their own houses in order.

Which brings us back to the damaging global fall-out of the US Supreme Court decision including concerns that it will [embolden anti-abortion movements](#) elsewhere.

Fearing just that, a group of MEPs has asked that anti-abortion lobbyists be banned from the European Parliament.

### ***Metsola from Malta – where all abortion is illegal***

European Parliament president Roberta Metsola, who is from Malta, is believed to have an [anti-abortion voting track record](#) and Malta is the only EU country where abortion is [not allowed under any circumstances](#).

Poland’s government has adopted a [near-total ban on abortion](#) with limited exceptions in the cases of rape, incest, or danger to the mother’s life.

And there is the unhappy fact that EU members [Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania and Slovakia](#) have [yet to ratify the Istanbul Convention](#), the first legally-binding international instrument on preventing and combating violence against women and girls at the international level.

The Polish government may withdraw from the agreement and despite widespread public protests and legal pushbacks, Turkey's Council of State [recently ruled to uphold](#) president Recep Tayyip Erdogan's decision to take Turkey out of the convention.

In contrast, [Ukraine has ratified the agreement](#) as part of its efforts to meet EU membership criteria.

There is no denying that advances in women's rights are being made by governments, international organisations, businesses and civil society actors.

But as recent events illustrate, there is much hard work ahead.

Ending [centuries of discrimination, deep-rooted patriarchy and misogyny](#) as well religious extremism and far-right populism which fuel the war on women requires counter-actions on multiple fronts.

Glib references and occasional mentions of gender equality in

speeches and in long, rambling documents are not enough.

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