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Many thanks to creative director Katrin Hoffmann,  
who took care of the layout for this issue!

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# EDITORIAL

Priscilla Todd

IWNEWS EDITOR



At the 2002 Congress in Sri Lanka, I put up my hand to take over the role of English Editor of International Women's News (IWNews) from scholar and writer, Jan Marsh, who was taking on a full-time assignment with the Portrait Gallery in London. I can't quite remember how this came about except that I had encouragement and support, particularly from Joke Sebus who, in the late 1990s, had started producing the Alliance's first digital Newsletter, and I became her proofreader to correct, as she always said, her 'Dutchy English'.

IWNews has been edited over the years by women with different interests and skills and presented in different formats. In 2008, during meetings in The Netherlands, the IIAV in Amsterdam hosted us for a day and we were able to see early editions in the IAW archives held there. This strengthened my belief that IWNews is an informative archive stretching back almost to the Alliance's inauguration. It complements our more recently developed Newsletter which regularly brings current information and news to our members. As well, the development of our website has continued to progress and gives the Alliance a broad presence internationally.

At the time I became Editor, IWNews was published and printed in England and mailed out to IAW members. The printers were friendly and supportive and very patient with me. I had the support of Hilary Paddon who continued to produce the French pages. Helen Self became an invaluable proofreader and commentator on text with her impeccable understanding of the English language.

My first challenge was to feature the IAW 2004 Centenary. In 1904 the Alliance had been inaugurated in Berlin and plans for the Centenary celebrations with meetings in Berlin and Freiburg had been underway for several years. The first edition of IWNews Vol 100 in 2005 was titled Centenary Edition and photographs in colour were introduced!

From then on, I continued to cover as much about the Alliance as possible, its presence at the UN, CSW and other international bodies, its actions in groups, individually and within member organisations across so many issues. I also started researching and learning more about women and their issues around the world, putting together news items of interest to our members. →

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# EDITORIAL

Priscilla Todd

IWNEWS EDITOR

My thanks to Lea Boergerding, Holly Herbert and Jessica Orban for expanding this into a colourful regular report in recent years as well as for their ongoing support.

Meanwhile, the heavy production and printing costs and, more so, mailing costs were draining the Alliance's funds. The Board grappled with the fact that many of our members would find it hard to give up their printed copies of IWNews but finally determined that the whole process must become completely digital. A new production house was found in Europe to design and format IWNews, using text and photographs that I emailed to them for each edition, after which that edition was checked again by our proofreaders before being distributed online to all our members. Hilary decided against working digitally at that time so I had to rely more heavily on our French proofreaders.

After some years, the Communications Unit started to look at rejuvenating IWNews and subsequently the Board supported a thematic format presented by President Joanna Manganara, who then proceeded to source topics and contributing writers. In 2015 a new format was devised by graphic designer Melita Krommyda based in Athens and Vol 110 No 2 was produced. We greatly enjoyed working together over the next eight years and I would like to record my thanks to Melita for her dedication and friendship.

During those years the IWNews content gradually changed and the Communications Unit started to discuss further changes which resulted in a new format devised by Holly Herbert (see the two Vol 118 2023 Journals under Website/ Publications/Journal). At the same time I wanted to stand down as Editor and applicants were sought. We were lucky to attract some excellent candidates and to appoint Kerstin Löffler, a professional in the publishing field, based in Berlin.



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# EDITORIAL

Priscilla Todd

IWNEWS EDITOR

I welcome Kerstin wholeheartedly and am confident she will present us with an interesting new look for International Women's News. **BUT she needs our ongoing advice, ideas and strong support.** I was impressed, for instance, with the ideas put forward by CSW attendees in their reports for IWNews Vol 118 No1 2023. They understand the importance of building and maintaining strong lines of communication.

**I want to thank all of you who have helped me over the last two decades. May I encourage you to welcome Kerstin; tell her about yourself, your interests within IAW and suggest/ask how you might be able to become involved with this old established but ever changing publication.**

My warmest good wishes to you all for 2024.

**Priscilla Todd**

January 2024

# HELLO, I'M THE NEW ONE.

Kerstin Löffler  
IWNEWS EDITOR



Today is a special day for me – because what you are just looking at is the first issue of IWNews that I have the pleasure of presenting to you as the new editor.

I am very pleased. And it is an honor for me to take over from Priscilla Todd. After all, this journal is something special and rich in tradition – a publication that has been around for around one hundred and twenty years.

I come from Germany and have been in journalism for over twenty years, including more than ten years as a journalist and foreign correspondent for the international news agency AFP.

I am very pleased to be here today. And that I am now part of IWNews. But I am especially looking forward to meeting you!

Who are you, where do you read the journal, in which part of the world?

What topics are you interested in? What would you like to read about in one of the next issues?

As you can see, I am curious. Let me know what topic moves you, what we should report on - or what you would like to report on yourself, we are always happy to hear from contributors!

I am pleased to meet you.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kersti". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

PS: Chère lectrice francophone! Nous serions ravis d'avoir une section francophone dans le prochain numéro – aimerais-tu y contribuer? Quels sont les thèmes qui te tiennent à cœur? De quoi discute-t-on dans ta région? Fais-le nous savoir, écris-moi à [iawiwn@womenalliance.org](mailto:iawiwn@womenalliance.org)

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# PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Alison Brown

IAW President



I would say “Happy New Year” but the year has not begun in a happy fashion: violence against women crescendos around the globe, with the particular hot spots of Gaza, Israel, Ukraine, the Democratic Republic of Congo, among others (the list would fill my entire page). Women’s constant cry for peace, without which there is no prosperity, and the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 are more necessary than ever.

However, we are off to a good start in our preparations for the **Commission on the Status of Women 68th Session**, reports from which should fill a whole edition of the International Women’s News. “We are thrilled to be co-sponsoring two in-person Parallel Events in partnership with African Women’s Health Project International AWHPI GLOBAL FOUNDATION. The first one is “Multilateral Approach To Achieve SDGS By 2030; Through The Lens Of Gender Equality” Tues, 12 March, 2024.

The second is “Multilateral Approach to Achieve SDGs by 2030: Empowering Women, Enabling Peace and Foster Sustainable Development by Accelerating Gender Equality” on Tues, 19 March, 2024.

In addition we will co-sponsor “Available protections and services to fight exploitation and trafficking of women and girls”; “Achieving women’s economic success through ensuring reproductive and family planning freedoms”; “Achieving the Adoption of CEDAW Principles with Collaborations and Consultations in Cities, Counties, and States”; and “Poverty and CEDAW” with our new Associate Member, National Council of Jewish Women San Francisco Section.

All IAW members are encouraged to register for the NGO CSW forum at <https://ngoCSW68forum.vfairs.com/> to follow the discussions and attend the many fascinating Parallel Events on offer. The Editor of the International Women’s News will be glad to receive reports on your impressions of the event from across the waters.



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# PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Alison Brown

IAW President

IAW is delighted to be organizing another in-person event, the first since 2019 – the **International Meeting** 5-9 September 2024. The Presidents and Directors of IAW Affiliates and Associates as well as members of the extended Board will meet in the resort town of Bankya, outside of Sofia, Bulgaria to confer upon the Action Programme, the Theme of the Triennial Congress and the direction IAW should take in the coming years.

Each member of IAW is invited to attend the discussions as well. We are honored to have the President of the European Women's Lobby, Iliana Balabanova, as keynote speaker at the opening of the International Meeting, which we hope to offer in a hybrid form.

During the Seminar on Women's Networking, also expected to be hybrid, we look forward to hearing from The Honorable Susan Breall, California Superior Court Judge & San Francisco Coalition Against Human Trafficking Co-Chair. Our newest member organisations Bulgarian Platform European Women's Lobby and National Council of Jewish Women San Francisco will talk about their experiences with networking on local, national and international levels and hopes for future progress under the IAW umbrella.

In addition, we will discuss networking techniques suggested by Board Member Artemis Westenberg of the Netherlands for effective CSW and CEDAW lobbying and, we hope, the projet Termitière as presented by Dr Goumaïwè Djamil ASSAMA SIDI of Lome, Togo.

After the work comes the play and we intend to offer an excellent three-day tour of the historic sights of the near-by areas of Bulgaria's capital, Sofia with an experienced tour guide, during which we can continue to talk feminist politics and deepen our friendships.



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# Respecting women with disabilities rights in time of crises: challenges and opportunities

By Dr. Ernestine NGO MELHA, IAW Vice President, Founder, Executive Director and UN Representative, Association d'Aide à l'Education de l'Enfant Handicapé (AAEEH)-Associate

## Introduction

Since 2020 and due to the various crises, technology is present in almost all aspects of our lives. It affects how we work, learn, communicate and participate in the public sphere. Yet women are four times less likely than men to have advanced ICT skills and hold less than 20% of jobs in the sector (UNESCO).

Growing inequalities are becoming increasingly evident in digital skills and access to technology, with women being left behind due to this digital gender divide. The need for inclusive and transformative technologies and digital education is therefore crucial for a sustainable future.

Recent crises have shown in fact the lack of preparation in terms of taking disability into account in crisis and emergency situations.

## Digital exclusion

The measures taken by States to respond to the pandemic resulted in a sudden shift to internet-based living, including healthcare provision, education, employment, access to goods and services, as well as more general socialisation.

'Digital divide' existed for persons with disabilities during the pandemic. This was attributed to a number of factors, including 'digital poverty, low digital literacy, co-ordination difficulties in using phones and laptops/tablets and living in areas with low internet connectivity'.

The participation of women and other marginalized groups in the technology sector results in more creative solutions and offers greater potential for innovations that meet the needs of women and promote gender equality.



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But lack of legally binding regulations, lack of funds, insufficient awareness of the ICTs accessible services that do exist and the need to develop more and better ones remain the principal challenges further excluding disadvantaged groups of society such as – persons with disabilities. This exclusion hinders their ability to participate actively in social, economic and cultural life on equal footing.

Digital technologies have proven to be practical and tangible tools for women and girls to improve their living conditions. ICTs can facilitate women to gain employment (for example through telework or newly created information jobs), obtain cost-effective health services and education (such as through online courses or software-based literacy programs) and to increase their income (such as through e-business channels and online transactions). This would imply a virtuous circle, whereas women and girls could fight their current disadvantages in society by exploiting new digital opportunities.

It therefore stresses the need to close the gender digital divide by investing in the digital literacy and skills of older women and by providing them with universal and affordable access to and use of information and communications technologies, including new technologies, and the use of digitally enabled services.

**Inclusion that leaves no one behind:** ICTs should be developed in such a way as to accommodate the diversity of users with emphasis on quality, accessibility and affordability. The interest of women and girls with disabilities, elderly women must be integrated into the design and implementation of ICTs programmes so that all benefit equally and participate in all the sectors of the economy and the social and political life.

Bearing in mind that the United Nations identifies access to information, including digital information and the Internet, as a basic human right that should be extended to all citizens of the world, a prime goal of digital inclusion must be full implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

The Convention designates ICTs as an integral component of accessibility rights, on par with transportation and the physical environment. Implementation of CRPD also reflects and impacts on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the global commitment “that no one will be left behind”.

However, leaving no one behind will be possible only if quality ICTs are available, accessible and affordable to all, and in particular to the disadvantaged groups of society – persons with disabilities, persons with specific needs, including indigenous peoples and people living in rural areas, women and girls, youth and children, as well as older persons.



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Let me recall the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) as its normative framework and focuses on States Parties' obligations towards those individuals with regard to accessibility.

### **State obligations towards persons with disabilities the requirements of the CRPD**

The CRPD is a treaty based on the principles of equality and non-discrimination. It had ground-breaking levels of involvement by the rights-holders and this drafting dynamic is reflected in its requirement that States Parties 'closely consult with and actively involve persons with disabilities' in decision-making processes concerning them through their representative organizations'.

**Article 9 of the CRPD** requires States to identify and eliminate obstacles and carriers to accessibility in all aspects of life. This obligation not only includes access to physical spaces, but also the right to access information, as well as personal assistance for the facilitation of accessibility and the utilisation of technology.

### **Article 6 – Women with disabilities**

1. States Parties recognize that women and girls with disabilities are subject to multiple discrimination, and in this regard shall take measures to ensure the full and equal enjoyment by them of all human rights and fundamental freedoms.

2. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure the full development, advancement and empowerment of women, for the purpose of guaranteeing them the exercise and enjoyment of the human rights and fundamental freedoms set out in the present Convention.

Call on member states, UN entities, UN Women, and civil society to include women with disabilities and older women in the center of all policies, ensuring gender equality.

**We recommend:** accessible assistive technology, as well as safe and affordable access to the Internet, to give women and girls, with disabilities the opportunity to be actively involved, and on an equal basis with all others, in all aspects of public, political, economic, cultural, and social life.

Awareness Studies indicate that the elderly respond slowly to change and shun the use of modern technologies, and therefore the need for responsive and customized digital tools that leave no one behind.

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# WINS FOR WOMEN

*Developments that gave us hope last year*



## Historic Women's Strike in Iceland Protests Gender Pay Gap and Violence

On October 24th, 2023, tens of thousands of women and non-binary individuals, including Iceland's Prime Minister, united in a powerful act of collective action, setting aside their usual responsibilities, whether paid or unpaid. This mass demonstration, known as "kvinnafri" or women's day off, protested the persisting gender pay gap and the prevalence of gender-based violence.

Notably, this marked the first full-day women's strike since 1975.

Despite Iceland's consistent #1 ranking in the World Economic Forum's global gender gap rankings for 14 consecutive years, the stark reality persists with a gender pay gap of up to 21%. More than 40% of women in Iceland have experienced gender-based or sexual violence. The planned walkout served as an important reminder that there is still much work to be done in achieving true gender equality.

***“Violence against women and the undervalued work of women in the labour market are two sides of the same coin.”*** Drífra Snædal

Drífra Snædal, one of the organisers of the strike, emphasised the interconnectedness of issues, stating, "We are now trying to connect the dots...violence against women and the undervalued work of women in the labour market are two sides of the same coin and have an effect on each other." The demonstration, echoing the spirit of the historic 1975 women's strike, stands as a powerful call for change, urging society to address systemic issues that perpetuate gender inequality. *–Holly Herbert*

# WINS FOR WOMEN

Developments that gave us hope last year



## Record-Breaking Moments and Inspirational Triumphs: Australia Hosts FIFA Women's World Cup 2023

Australia played host to the FIFA Women's World Cup in 2023, providing a unique opportunity for the nation to rally behind their national women's football team, the Matildas, in their pursuit of the coveted Cup. Matilda mania swept across the country, leading to cancelled meetings, rescheduled sporting events, and the installation of massive screens nationwide to cater to the enthusiasm of Matilda fans.

Although the Matildas did not secure the Cup, their remarkable journey left a permanent mark, inspiring the younger generation and setting unprecedented records for Australian women's football. Noteworthy achievements include:

- Record crowd attendance, with nearly 2 million spectators throughout the tournament.
- The semi-final clash against England set records with a staggering 7.13 million viewers (almost 28% of the Australian population), marking it as the most-watched television program in Australia since 2001.
- The Matildas became the first Australian football team ever to reach the semi-final stage of a World Cup.

The Women's World Cup witnessed several historic moments contributing to the tournament's success:

- The longest penalty shootout in World Cup history, spanning 20 spot kicks to determine the winner (Australia emerged victorious against France).
- A record-breaking 163 goals scored.
- Casey Yu-jin Phair from South Korea became the youngest player at just 16 to make a World Cup appearance.
- Quinn from Canada made history as the first openly transgender and non-binary player.
- Nouhaila Benzina from Morocco became the first player to wear a hijab in the FIFA World Cup.
- Eight debutant teams added to the diversity and excitement of the tournament.

The overall success of the Women's FIFA World Cup has transformed perceptions of women's capabilities, contributing to a positive shift in women's sports. Breaking down barriers, challenging gender stereotypes, and expanding opportunities for women in sports, the tournament has fuelled the dreams and confidence of girls aspiring to score their own goals.

–Holly Herbert

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## WINS FOR WOMEN

*Developments that gave us hope last year*

### **Historic Swearing-In: Laphonza Butler assumes U.S. Senate Seat, Making strides for Diversity and Advocacy**

In early October, Laphonza Butler was sworn into the U.S. Senate seat previously held by the late Sen. Dianne Feinstein. A seasoned leader, Butler, former president of Emily's List and advocate for women and working people, now holds several historic titles. She is the sole Black woman in the current Congress serving as a U.S. senator, the first openly LGBTQ representative for California in the Senate, and the first Black lesbian in American congressional history.

Human Rights Campaign president, Kelley Robinson hails Butler's appointment as "a landmark moment in the fight for social, racial, and economic justice." Robinson emphasises Butler's advocacy for crucial issues, including abortion rights, the labour movement, and civil rights, positioning her as an exceptional voice in addressing challenges faced by marginalised communities.

Laphonza Butler's ascent to the Senate marks a significant stride toward increased diversity and representation in the highest echelons of American politics, ensuring that her unique perspective contributes to the national dialogue on pressing issues.

*–Holly Herbert*



### **South Africa to introduced shared parental leave**

South Africa is set to become the first African nation to introduce shared parental leave, thanks to a recent high court ruling. The decision grants both parents the right to time off after childbirth and adoption. What sets this ruling apart is its provision for parents to collaboratively decide how to divide four months of parental leave between them, challenging traditional gender roles associated with care giving.

This departure from the previous norm of four months for mothers and a maximum of 10 days for fathers marks a significant milestone in promoting gender equality. The judgment is a promising step toward a more balanced caregiving landscape in South Africa, this decision not only sets a precedent for the African continent but also adds to the global discourse on the importance of inclusive parental leave policies. *–Holly Herbert*



# The Path of Protest

Picture an Indian woman – doe eyed, serene submissive draped in a sari. That is the way the world sees them for the most part ignoring the fact that Indian women have been fighters and led protests, standing up against seemingly insurmountable odds. Gang rape is just one of these - the harrowing incident of Jyoti Pandey, otherwise known as Nirbhaya, brought thousands out of the streets declaring that this would never again happen, while the world watched aghast. The image of the doe-eyed silent woman was shattered.

Then came Bilkis Banoo - at 21 and pregnant, she became a victim of a brutal gang rape in the aftermath of the Godhra Station train burning, an event that cast a dark shadow over the Gujarat riots of 2002—a horror silently endorsed by the State. Now known as Bilkis Dadi or Granny Bilkis, Bilkis Banoo emerged from the shadows, resilient and alive four decades later to lead a hijab-wearing sit-in at Shaheen Bagh in New Delhi from December 2019 to March 2020 braving the bone chilling cold of winter Delhi —a response to the contentious Citizenship Amendment Act, which fast-tracks citizenship for migrants from certain countries, excluding Muslims.

Her gang rape history though not forgotten, was overshadowed by the scope of Shaheen Bagh. Inspired by the women she led, similar movements sprung up in other parts of the country. From Park Circus in Kolkata to Lucknow's Ghantaghar to Bengaluru's Bilal Bagh, relatively less-known neighbourhoods in Indian cities brimmed with protesting woman and senior citizens from all walks of life.

*Less-known neighbourhoods in Indian cities brimmed with protesting woman and senior citizens from all walks of life.*

For weeks, speeches were made, poems recited, songs sung. The Preamble to the Constitution was read aloud in chorus. In between political parties made sporadic attempts to oust the protesters; a goon named Kapil Gurjar even fired at the gathering in Delhi. But the protesters followed the rulebook of non-violent agitation to the letter. This shook the Central Government far more than anything else since the women held their ground unfazed by police threats for 101 days, until Covid disrupted their cause.



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## The road ahead is long and arduous

However, within days the name came to signify much more than its geography - Shaheen Bagh became a synonym for the democratic ideals of the Indian nation. It was invoked to refer to the constitutional principles that bind the people of a country together: fellow feeling, compassion, kindness.

The struggle for women's rights resonates across the expanse of India, encompassing issues ranging from gang rape to domestic violence and discrimination. In a society entrenched in patriarchal norms, women have found a voice through silent protests, challenging stereotypes and asserting their presence in the public sphere. Social media, wielded skilfully by some Indian women, not only promotes nonviolent tactics but also draws international attention, fostering a global dimension to their cause. The Shaheen Bagh protests, with their inclusive participation of women and the elderly, shattered preconceived notions of Indian women as passive victims.

These protests, driven by women demanding enhanced public safety, reforms in the judicial system, and greater dignity and autonomy, inadvertently sparked a heightened awareness of gender injustice. The involvement of women in political activism, once marginalized, has led to a growing realisation of the long-standing gender disparities. The narrative of change is not new; it echoes back to the Chipko Movement of the 1970s, where women and children physically embraced trees to prevent deforestation, challenging the status quo.

Amidst these struggles, institutional reforms like the Seventy-Third Amendment Act of 1992 aimed to increase women's political participation, reserving at least one-third of local government seats for women.

However, the path to effective participation is hindered by obstacles such as lower literacy rates, insufficient training, and a lack of access to party networks. Organised revolts and protests become the recourse for women, especially those from rural areas, to amplify their voices.

As part of this year's narrative, Bilkis Banoo's rapists, initially jailed, were prematurely released in 2022 under the State's dubious argument that they deserved a chance at reform. Their release coincided ominously with the celebration of 75 years of India's independence.

In the face of such travesties, appeals were launched against these verdicts. Bilkis Banoo, a high-profile victim, found support in numerous PILs, including those filed by prominent figures such as CPI(M) leader Subhashini Ali, journalist Revati Laul, and former vice-chancellor of Lucknow University Roop Rekha Verma. Protests erupted yet again on the streets of Delhi, with demonstrators condemning the release of the convicts, while opposition leaders criticized the BJP for perceived biases and the erosion of women's rights.

These protests have however led only to more case hearings – a solution has not been reached proving yet again that while women are making inroads into political institutions and challenging traditional gender roles, achieving true gender equality in India remains a formidable journey.

The road ahead is long and arduous and will continue to be marked by ongoing protests, legal battles and a collective push for a society that recognizes and upholds the rights and dignity of every individual, irrespective of gender. –*Anjana Basu*



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## WINS FOR WOMEN

*Developments that gave us hope last year*

### Poland Election: A shift in Political landscape and Women's Rights

Poland's voters have spoken, signalling a turning point after eight years under the right-wing Law and Justice party (PiS). Despite winning the most votes in the recent parliamentary election, PiS fell short of a majority, marking the end of its dominant rule.

During PiS's governance, women's rights saw a decline with strict abortion laws and prescription requirements for emergency contraceptives. These decisions fuelled nationwide protests, making reproductive rights a central issue in the election.

#### *The pivotal moment saw the highest voter turnout since 1989*

The pivotal moment saw the highest voter turnout since 1989, reaching 74%, driven significantly by women and young voters. More women than men cast their votes, and 68.8% of voters under 29 participated, emphasising the influence of these underrepresented groups.

This surge in civic participation underscores a rejection of the status quo and highlights the power of women and young voters in shaping political outcomes. Poland's political landscape is witnessing a transformative shift, driven by a desire for inclusivity and progress, particularly in women's rights.

*–Holly Herbert*



### Mexico's Supreme Court decriminalises abortion Nation-wide

In September, Mexico's Supreme Court made historic decision, striking down all federal criminal penalties for abortion. The court declared the national laws prohibiting the procedure unconstitutional, citing violations of women's rights. This landmark ruling necessitates the removal of abortion from the federal penal code, compelling federal health institutions to provide abortion services upon request.

This decision builds on a 2019 ruling that declared abortion not a crime in one northern state, triggering a gradual state-by-state process of decriminalisation. While approximately 20 Mexican states still criminalise abortion, the recent ruling overrides penalties in these regions, though further legal action is required.

The Information Group for Chosen Reproduction (GIRE) celebrated the decision, asserting that "no woman or pregnant person, nor any health worker, will be able to be punished for abortion." This move positions Mexico at the forefront of advancing reproductive rights, fostering a more inclusive and compassionate approach to women's healthcare. *–Holly Herbert*

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## WINS FOR WOMEN

Developments that gave us hope last year

### Taiwan taking steps to Tackle Period Poverty for Gender Equality

Period poverty is a global challenge which can be defined as a lack of access to menstrual products, education, and hygiene facilities. Taiwan's proactive approach to address this issue, especially within its educational institutions, serves as a noteworthy example in the fight for gender equality.

In November 2022, the Taipei Rapid Transit Corporation initiated the battle against period poverty by offering menstrual care items at 20 stations. Building on this, Taiwan's Ministry of Education invested 3.18 million USD to provide free period products in all schools, universities, and ten additional venues across the nation, starting August 1, 2023.

**Taiwan's Ministry of Education invested 3.18 million USD to provide free period products**



Besides supplies at educational facilities, the government also offers subsidies and coupons for low-income students to buy supplies on their own.

Approximately 95,000 students are expected to benefit from this program, which not only addresses the immediate need for menstrual products but also integrates menstrual health education into the curriculum. Premier Chen Chien-Jen emphasises that this dual approach aims to destigmatise menstruation, reduce hardship, and promote gender equality. *–Holly Herbert*

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## WINS FOR WOMEN

*Developments that gave us hope last year*

# Empowering women in Zambia through climate and food projects



Lusaka - Empowering women to play a central role in climate change adaptation and mitigation efforts was the focus of our milestone project last year: "Building Women Leadership in Climate Resilience" aims to empower women to play a central role in climate change adaptation and mitigation efforts, while addressing gender inequalities.

It aims not only to increase women's participation at all levels of climate resilience initiatives, but also to provide training, mentorship and capacity building programs to develop women's leadership skills and enable them to play key roles in climate resilience projects and decision-making processes. The project is supported by Akina Mama Wa Afrika under the auspices of Voices for Just Climate Action (VCA).

The Zambia Women's Alliance has played a pivotal role in advancing women's rights and well-being, bringing about a significant and positive development for girls and women throughout the year, with more equitable food systems at the center of another positive development:

Ensuring fairness, inclusivity and sustainability throughout the food production and distribution chain was the focus of an "Ecofeminist Equitable Food Systems Symposium" in Zambia in 2023. Together with the Women's Life and Wellness Foundation and the Community Technology and Development Trust, the Zambia Alliance of Women (ZAW) brought together community members, farmers, experts, policy makers and stakeholders from various sectors to discuss and explore solutions for creating more equitable and sustainable food systems.

*- Edah Chimya*

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## WINS FOR WOMEN

*Developments that gave us hope last year*



# Barbie Movie Shatters Records

In a triumph for female-led filmmaking, Greta Gerwig's "The Barbie Movie" became a summer box office hit. As of October 25, 2023, the film has collected more than 635 million U.S. dollars at the North American box office, earning a total of 1.44 billion U.S. dollars worldwide, securing its place as America's highest-grossing movie of 2023.

Directed by Greta Gerwig, acclaimed for her women-centric narratives in films such as "Ladybird" (2017) and "Little Women" (2019), "The Barbie Movie" seamlessly integrates Barbie into Gerwig's portfolio of empowering female characters. Barbie, portrayed as curious and rebellious, stands as another testament to Gerwig's feminist filmmaking approach.

The success of "The Barbie Movie" extends beyond its financial triumphs. Breaking records both at the box office and in production, the film marks the largest opening for a woman producer.

Greta Gerwig's directorial prowess has not only cemented her status as one of the world's most renowned female directors but has also positioned her as the sole woman director to helm a billion-dollar-grossing film. "The Barbie Movie" has resonated globally, shattering barriers in the male-dominated film industry. Greta Gerwig's unique storytelling and Margot Robbie's transformative performance have elevated the classic Barbie character, turning the film into a cultural phenomenon, and setting a new standard for female-driven cinema.

*-Holly Herbert*

# A second UN Charter – shall we reimagine a renewed UN?

*Civil Society engagement during the 2023 UN General Assembly  
Program hosted by Baha'i International Community*



New York – We make choices every day. Over time, our individual and collective choices reveal our willingness, or lack thereof, to pursue reform that secures a healthier, equitable, and safe world environment for ourselves and posterity. So, what does it say about the stability, success, and purported multilateralism of the United Nations when the political leaders of France, Great Britain, India, Russia, and China choose to stay home and ignore the annual gathering of world leaders at the United Nations General Assembly?

This event asked participants to discuss whether this is the right time to write a revised UN Charter. Shall we move toward change incrementally or exponentially? Do we have the luxury of moving ahead at a snail's pace, over the ensuing decade, to wordsmith a revised Charter? Perhaps we should carefully review the slate of current world leaders and ask ourselves, seriously, is this the time to revise the UN charter?

Does the current state of geopolitics, based on flags and borders, defy the reality of today's fluid borders and pressing, unfulfilled and fundamental universal needs? Indeed, it seems that the drivers of change seem to be responsive consumption practices, youth's focus on the environment, financial restructuring, and intellectual/technological advances-not changing the text of the most widely respected and published document on human rights.

The UN Charter, adopted in 1945, followed the Great Depression and World War II. It was written as a response to the needs of people at the time and it supported Member States sovereignty and prohibited the use of force in international relations. The UN Charter has been amended many times since then. Today's panel was asked whether the UN Charter needed to be modified again, especially in light of the lessons learned from the COVID 19 pandemic and the need, once again, to improve the worldwide standard of living.

Against this backdrop, the Baha'i International Community gathered intellectuals to discuss whether our contemporaries' and immediate past generation made choices that effectuated the UN Charter's promise to be a living document that improves over time and adapts to critical issues of each era. Today's issues include catastrophic climate change, rampant inequalities, escalating conflict, technological disruptions, and devastating poverty.



The New York Times\* recently reported that the state of the UN is bleak. A couple of panelists concurred that the UN needed to reclaim its role as an intellectual thought leader and incubator of new ideas. They recommended that the UN craft a new architecture that fosters multilateralism and develops policy research coalitions.

The UN Is one of the largest producers of reliable social data. It needs to leverage this data to deflect misinformation. When posed with the lengthy time commitment entailed with this approach, further discussion centered on the ways that we can move closer to compliance with the existing UN policies and build a new revitalized system as we go.

Another panelist cautioned that the world was uniquely unstable at this time (Russian aggression against Ukraine, North Korea's rapid nuclearization, US' renewed rivalry with China, etc.) He argued the necessity of raising awareness of nuclear weapons and preparing for the likely use of nuclear weapons in hostilities. It seemed that he thought the only way to avoid nuclear war was to adopt a universal anti-suicide measure, i.e. SIMPLY: Don't Do It.

Eventually, a panelist lightened the room's mood a little when he redirected the conversation to a discussion on Agenda 2030 and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). He called the SDGs the integrated human security agenda, and he called on diplomats to focus on developing trust between nations.

More importantly, he argued that people needed to stop electing "bozos" who fail to see the world as one family-a universal family dependent on peace and security for each member.

So, what can we do to revive the United Nations, without undergoing the arduous and prolonged task of rewriting the Charter? Here is a list of potential suggestions:

Write a PRE-Preamble for the UN Charter that recognizes the fluidity of geopolitical borders.

Start electing representatives to the UN General Assembly who are elected by the people and not appointed by a government leader.

Hold governments accountable for their actions or inactions by looking at their budgets as much as their policies. View the UN in terms of dimensions instead of silos and focus on building trust between governments.

Start using the word "WE" to empower people to participate in their own governance.

Engage civil society initiatives, such as climate change, before the clock runs out waiting for governments to take timely and adequate measures.  
– Jill Follows, IAW UN Representative

\*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/09/18/world/middleeast/united-nations-global-south-general-assembly.html>

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## PREVIEW

### MARCH

## Poverty at the center of discussions at CSW 68

IAW at the Commission on the Status of Women in March in New York

New York - Poverty is the focus of this year's deliberations of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in New York. Poverty must be reduced so that gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls can be achieved more quickly, explained the UN Commission in advance of its annual meeting in New York. As every year, the International Alliance of Women intends to take part in the two-week sessions in March with a dozen of delegates.

In addition to the official events at the United Nations headquarters, many side events will take place from March 11 to 22, where we will have the opportunity to consult and discuss with other NGOs.

The International Alliance of Women has consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and as such has been invited as an observer to the CSW. The Forum of the Commission on the Status of Women is taking place for the 68th time this year.

### SEPTEMBER

## Finally, it's meeting time!

After a three years' interruption, we will finally be meeting again "for real" – the International Meeting of the International Alliance of Women will take place from September 5 to 9 in Bankya, Bulgaria. Bulgaria is the home of our new IAW Affiliate, [Bulgarian Platform European Women's Lobby](#), and Bankya is a spa resort about 15 kilometers outside of Sofia. At the International Meeting, the Executive Committee and Board members of the International Alliance of Women meet with the leaders of the Associates and Affiliates to discuss the direction, plans and goals of the organizational members.

This year, one of the topics will be our Congress, which takes place every three years and will next be held in 2025.

Registration information is on the IAW website.

If you do not find what you need, contact [members@womenalliance.org](mailto:members@womenalliance.org) for assistance with registering.

Late registration, however, may mean that the block of hotel rooms at the reduced rate could no longer be available.

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# International Women's News

## Nouvelles féministes Internationales

**INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S NEWS** is an open Forum for information and opinion on matters of importance to women. It is published by the International Alliance of Women. Items for publication in English should be sent to the Editor:

**Kerstin Löffler**, email: [iawiwn@womenalliance.org](mailto:iawiwn@womenalliance.org)

Individual membership of IAW includes an annual subscription to International Women's News.

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**Les NOUVELLES FÉMINISTES INTERNATIONALES**, publiées par l'Alliance Internationale des Femmes, constituent un forum ouvert pour l'information et l'opinion sur des questions importantes pour les femmes. Les textes en français destinés à la publication dans les NFI doivent être envoyés à la rédactrice : **Kerstin Löffler**, email: [iawiwn@womenalliance.org](mailto:iawiwn@womenalliance.org)

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