



Church of Sweden 

United Nations Population Fund



Women, Faith and Human Rights

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Buddhist woman praying in a temple complex, Sri Lanka
Walter Keller / third-eye-photography.de



Introduction

Women, Faith and Human Rights: At the Intersection of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights and Population Dynamics

Women's rights in general, and sexual and reproductive health and rights in particular, continue to be among the most contentious national, regional and global issues. They are especially so in intergovernmental settings where texts of agreements, outcome documents and statements have to be affirmed by multiple national delegations. The Programme of Action from the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo (1994), the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action from the Fourth World Conference on Women (1995), the annual Commission on the Status of Women and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) are constantly and increasingly challenged by some governmental positions, as well as by some vocal religiously inspired advocacy groups interacting with the UN system.

Issues relating to women, families, children or sexual identity often cause prolonged debates, both in formal discussions among UN Member States and with civil society representatives. The global political space for initiatives aiming at expanding women's human rights, which has certainly expanded since the UN World Conference on Women in Nairobi in 1985, appears increasingly to be filling with voices that would detract from and attack the agenda of gender equality and

who advocate for limitations on women's participation and rights in the recently endorsed global 2030 Agenda with its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In fact, religious women advocates of the human rights agenda are rarely heard in global intergovernmental dialogues and negotiations, and when they are present, their voices and perspectives are often on the sidelines rather than integrated within official events. This happens in spite of the important contributions they can—and do—make in public spaces and religious narratives.

The language of faith matters to many, if not most, of the world's peoples. And the language of human rights underpins all international agreements that frame engagement and accountability within and between nations. It is therefore critical to ensure that there is a time and place deliberately set aside for various faith traditions to engage in serious reflections on the interlinkages between human rights and faith, based on solid theological and sociological knowledge, and grounded in actual experiences in human development.

Thanks to the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) has been systematically engaging with faith-based partner organizations and religious leaders since December 2013. In 2015, the Church of Sweden

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