

Civil society leaders issue statement to step up the fight on inequality

The world faces an inequality crisis that is spiralling out of control. Across the world we are seeing the gap between the richest and the rest reach extremes not seen in a century.

Struggles for a better world are all threatened by the inequality crisis. Workers across the world are seeing their wages and conditions eroded as inequality increases. The rights of women are systematically worse in situations of greater economic inequality. The vast majority of the world's richest people are men; those in the most precarious and poorly paid work are women. Young people are facing a crisis of unemployment. Other groups such as migrants, ethnic minorities, LGBTQI people, people with disability and indigenous people continue to be pushed to the margins, suffering systematic discrimination. The struggle to realise the human rights of the majority are continually undercut in the face of such disparities of wealth and power.

Extreme inequality is also frequently linked to rising restrictions on civic space and democratic rights as political and economic elites collude to protect their interests. The right to peaceful protest and the ability of citizens to challenge the prevailing economic discourse is being curtailed almost everywhere, for elites know that extreme inequality and participatory democracy cannot co-exist for long.

Even the future of our planet is dependent on ending this great divide, with the carbon consumption of the 1% as much as 175 times that of the poorest.

Our current economic system is not working at many levels. Dominated by an over-confidence in the benefits of the market, it helps only a small elite, and is failing the majority, and failing the planet. There is widespread agreement that we are living through an inequality crisis. On this the IMF, the Pope and many other influential voices are agreed. The time has come to do something about it. The current system did not come about by accident. It is the result of deliberate policy choices. It is the result of our leaders listening to the 1% instead of to the majority. This has to change.

This is all happening at the time when the international community has agreed a new set of Sustainable Development Goals (Agenda 2030), and has come together to discuss financing development and crucially the Climate Change Accord in Paris where every country agreed to work together to combat climate change.

We know that existing commitments, and much more beyond that must be done, will not be realised without a fight. That is why today we are coming together as the beginnings of a global alliance to fight inequality.

We will work together with others to tackle the root causes of inequality, whether they be economic, political, social or cultural. We will press governments to meet their obligations to ensure people can enjoy their rights to health, education and other essential public services through tackling tax dodging and ensuring progressive tax and spend policies. We will support workers' rights to freedom of association and collective bargaining, and narrow the gap between rich and poor. We will fight for the redistribution of women's unequal share of unpaid care work, and the tackling of violence against women brought on by state repression and rising fundamentalism. We will advocate for universal social protection floors. We will fight for land reform. We will work together to challenge the disproportionate power and practices of the corporate sector that is undermining so many struggles, contributing to human rights violations and increasing inequality across the globe. We will work together with others to secure climate justice. We will take on the power of corporations, including fossil fuel companies who are undermining efforts which respond to science and protect people and planet. We will together champion international cooperation so every country plays its part and we avoid a race to the bottom.

The current face of failed globalisation is rising inequality, conflict, corruption and oppression. The world needs fundamental change through a new economic model that puts the interests of people first. We need change on a

scale never seen before. People across the world must be at the heart of demanding and driving this change. Only such a people powered movement can build a breakthrough that unites governments, trade unions, civil society and companies who share a commitment to the common good.

We choose to imagine a better world than this, where everyone's human rights are respected, protected and fulfilled. We believe humanity has the talent, technology, and brilliance to build that better world, where the interests of the majority are put first. And we believe the time has come to fight for it together.

Adriano Campolina, Chief Executive, ActionAid

John Nduna, General Secretary, ACT Alliance

Salil Shetty, General Secretary, Amnesty International

Lydia Alpízar Durán, Executive Director, Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID)

Bernd Nilles, Secretary General, CIDSE

Dhananjayan Sriskandarajah, General Secretary, CIVICUS

Mads Christensen, Acting Executive Director, Greenpeace

Sharan Burrow, General Secretary, International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC)

Winnie Byanyima, Executive Director, Oxfam