



Creating Transformational Change

Strides in Systemic Impact for 2023

Prepared for Together Women Rise - February 2024

Equality Now has made some remarkable strides toward protecting girls and survivors from the harms they face. We are thrilled to share the following updates of the incredibly important work supported through our Transformation Partnership with Together Women Rise. This deeply meaningful partnership is having a tremendous impact on the lives of women and girls and the communities to which they belong. We have much work to do, but we are pleased to provide the following updates and we hope you feel a sense of accomplishment in what we have been able to do together over this past year.

Ensuring Legal Equality for Women and Girls:

Throughout 2023, we have helped change 14 laws, including legal reforms in Japan, Mexico, Liberia, Nepal, Bolivia, the US, the UK, Uzbekistan and beyond to combat sex-discriminatory laws, child marriage, female genital mutilation (FGM), sexual violence and exploitation, and more. Specifically, we have:

- In December 2022, Japan abolished the discriminatory waiting period for re-marriage altogether. This change will take effect in April 2024. Article 733 of Japan's Civil Code prohibits women, but not men, from remarrying for 100 days after the dissolution or annulment of a marriage.
- Following [years of advocacy](#) against “marry your rapist” discriminatory laws and [joint submissions](#) to the UN with our partner Bahrain Women Union, Bahrain’s parliament agreed in May to cancel Article 353 of the Penal Code, which allows rapists to escape punishment if they marry their victims. This is a great precedent for other gulf countries.
- We also ended 2023 with a momentous win for girls in Zambia with the passage of the amendment to the Marriage Act. This bill brings the minimum age of marriage to 18 without exception and crucially removes the exception for customary marriages. Equality Now supported our partner, Generation Alive, with their advocacy work helping to prepare and deliver petitions to Parliament. Child marriage is a driver of sexual violence against girls, so this bill will help protect girls throughout Zambia.



- In April 2023, Washington State introduced a new law to protect women and children from FGM following the tireless advocacy of our partner, the Washington Coalition to End FGM/C. The law change left just nine US states without laws against FGM.

UN Submissions and Other Engagement:

Equality Now made 18 submissions to the United Nations calling out nations that are defaulting on their commitments to gender equality. Of specific note, the UN Human Rights Committee cited our recommendations in a searing report on the US government's failure to meet its human rights obligations.

We continue to advocate for equal rights for women and girls in the US and campaign on the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) including through active participation in the ERA Coalition, connecting the ERA to international law and the global picture on constitutional equality. We launched a well-received video, participated in the ERA Coalition's [Centennial](#) Conference in Seneca Falls in July, and published a new [I Need the ERA Because... LGBTQ+ rights are Human Rights](#) campaign. We also welcomed the introduction of a new bill from Senator Gillibrand and Congresswoman Cori Bush which also recognizes the ERA as the 28th amendment and refutes any lingering arguments against its validity.

Together with our partners, the ERA Coalition, Unchained at Last, the US End FGM/C Network, and the Alliance for Universal Digital Rights (AUDRi), we made a joint submission to the UN Human Rights Committee for its session in October 2023 where it considered the United States' Fifth Periodic Report. We turned the submission into a [report](#) for further advocacy and supported our partner in their participation of the Committee's session in Geneva by making oral statements at their formal briefings with civil society before the dialogue with the Governments.

We are thrilled to report that the Human Rights Committee's [concluding observations](#) included several of Equality Now's joint recommendations. The Committee called upon the US Government to 1) "guarantee protections against sex- and gender-based discrimination in its Constitution" through an Equal Rights Amendment and ratification of CEDAW; 2) enact state laws against FGM and effectively implement the Stop FGM Act, and 3) adopted measures at all levels to prohibit marriage under the age of 18. Unfortunately, the Committee did not pick up our specific recommendations regarding online sexual exploitation and abuse, but they did call on the US to redouble efforts to address all forms of violence against women as well as human

trafficking.

As you well know, part of our work at Equality Now is not only advocating for the passage of laws but ensuring that these laws are properly implemented and that stakeholders are effectively utilizing and upholding them. Our work to train investigators, police, prosecutors and judges in the country of Georgia has helped increase prosecution rates for sexual violence crimes by more than 77%. We are thrilled to report that this was cited as one of the reasons the European Union just granted the country its long awaited "candidate status" last year.

Strengthening Women's Movements:

Our work is strengthened through our local partnerships and coalitions. In September 2023, we [launched the Hurra Coalition](#) in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. The coalition is expanding rapidly and currently consists of 15 organizations from nine Arab states with Equality Now as secretariat. Equality Now supports coalition members with the coordination of subgrants to seven organizations in six countries. We also provide technical expertise in developing and implementing legal and media advocacy campaigns; access to a pool of MENA experts on Shari'a and international human rights; and training for young activists in the development of media campaigns, as well as, helping to develop the leaders of our partners and youth activists, some of whom are now working with each other on new programs of work independently of Equality Now, demonstrating the emerging strength of Hurra.

Looking Forward:

This is just the tip of the iceberg and already two months into 2024, we are driving forward all areas of our work at rapid speed including:

- We are in the process of developing model laws to address the explosive growth in tech-facilitated violence and abuses against women and girls. We have won many new government and corporate champions for our recently-formed Alliance for Universal Digital Rights and campaign which has quickly become a go-to source for expert guidance on how to address tech-facilitated violence against women and girls. We are collaborating with partners to develop a first-of-its-kind model law on tech-facilitated violence for Latin America which will be informed by survivors and our work on similar laws in other parts of the world. Once the model law is complete, we hope to launch the



new law in Brazil as a model for other nations to follow. We won a landmark victory in a litigation case before the InterAmerican Court of Human Rights that will expand access to justice for survivors of sexual violence in Bolivia and sets a strong legal precedent that nations across the region can be held to. We're being inundated with requests from governments and local organizations across Latin America to help them usher in the same changes.

- We are also pursuing two strategic litigation cases that will shine a global spotlight on how survivors of sexual violence with disabilities are frequently denied justice and revictimized in the court system.
- Lastly, Equality Now also is an impact partner on the Oscar-nominated documentary film, *To Kill a Tiger*, which chronicles a father's relentless pursuit of justice for his daughter after she was raped by local boys in their town in India. We are currently working with the film team to develop a global impact campaign to raise global awareness around how difficult it is for survivors to get justice, and to change attitudes and responses to sexual violence against adolescent girls.

We are thrilled to share the above updates of the incredibly important work supported through Together Women Rise. Your ongoing partnership and generosity is having a tremendous impact on the lives of women and girls. It is because of partners like you that we are able to do this work. We hope you feel a sense of pride in what we've accomplished together, and we look forward to continuing this work as the year progresses.