THE FEMINIST MOVEMENT IN LATIN AMERICA

The fourth wave of feminism in the Generation Equality Forum

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The most recent feminist movements have brought about a powerful force for change that transcends the borders between Latin American nations. What happens in one country becomes a precedent that goes on to inspire young women in another. The criminalization of abortion, femicide, abductions, violence, inequality, sexual harassment, criminalization... Feminists in Latin America are rallying together to confront all of these issues. Since 2020, peaceful protests in Mexico have evolved to include forms of activism aimed at drawing the attention of the national government and the world at large to the reality of gender violence in Mexico, which ranks as one of the most dangerous countries for women, with an estimated 10 femicides taking place every day. Activists and groups in Mexico have been a source of inspiration for feminist protest throughout the region.

In Argentina, movements demanding the right to abortion as a public health issue have drawn support from all over the world, achieving their objective of legalizing the practice late last year thanks to the perseverance and dedication of feminists who have been demanding this right for the past four decades. In Chile, it was adolescents in high schools who spearheaded the social uprising that, following months of protests and police repression, would ultimately lead to the drafting of the world’s first gender-equal constitution. This milestone has never before been reached in any democracy.

The feminist protests and strikes that began in Chile’s universities and high schools in May 2018 sparked outrage over the sexual harassment that women faced in Chile’s educational establishments, and these demands soon spread throughout the region. Universities in Mexico also went on strike, demanding a better system for reporting and taking action against university professors implicated in cases of sexual harassment. In Central America, Costa Rican universities saw the rise of the #MePasóenlaUNA and #MePasóenlaUCR movements (#ItHappenedToMeAtUNA/UCR). These viral hashtags carrying anonymous reports of sexual harassment generated an outcry that led to the creation of new protocols to address the issue. This is a country that has succeeded in passing laws that punish sexual harassment in a variety of settings. In Guatemala, too, female students have presented research on the data surrounding gender violence and sexual harassment in public universities, leading to public outcry and demands aimed at the educational authorities. Increasing numbers of accusations are being raised in private universities as well. Throughout the region, the pursuit of a secondary and tertiary education sector free of gender violence is now a priority.

The feminist movement is more active than ever in Latin America, with social networks acting as a forum for connection and exchange between countries, movements, organizations, and activists. The issues with which we are faced, and the various methods of mobilization that have taken place in Latin America, are enormous, and are replicated all around the region and in every space occupied by the women who live here.

How can we translate these experiences, which are so different and yet fundamentally so similar, at the Generation Equality Forum? How can we define the region’s main issues, when Latin America is made up of so many different countries, all at different stages in their human rights journeys, and with such a diverse population of women? We women face a variety of distinct issues: rural issues, indigenous issues, land sovereignty, the rights of students and girls, and sexual diversity. It seems like an impossible task, but our goal is to present to UN Women the primary problems facing Latin American youth.

First, we considered the issue, which involved ensuring that these themes, all requiring urgent attention in Latin America, be translated into action at the GEF. As National Youth Gender Activists (NYGAs), we arranged meetings with organizations and activists to define the priorities within our countries, so we could then define the priorities of the region as a whole. The problem was that we then had to unite our own priorities with those of other regions, and we did not know for sure if all of our work consulting and debating would in fact be taken into account at the GEF, and most importantly, that the opinions and demands that we made as young women would have an impact in the region. Our priorities? We urgently need mechanisms to prevent violence against women; a guarantee of our sexual and reproductive rights; the creation of more space for young women in decision-making; and to create training opportunities, particularly for indigenous and rural women.

The efforts made by young feminists to create gender equity in Latin America are now taking place in various spaces, directly combating the criminalization and violence that manifests itself in our governments, extractivist corporations, civil society, anti-choice groups, gender violence, and femicides. We resist, but we want the GEF to take our diverse voices into serious consideration, and for all of the sectors involved in the process to take action so that we can solve the problems that affect us. Above all, we want to be given the opportunity to drive these changes within the organizations in which we are already working to solve the region’s problems on a local and national level, and to be supported in organizing on a regional level. The fourth wave of feminism is already underway in Latin America: The Generation Equality Forum must not be left behind.

*\*Suggestion: Include photographs of the large-scale feminist protests mentioned in the text.*