

Amnesty International members only

Date: 25 May

# 2022 GLOBAL ASSEMBLY MEETING PAPER

## AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL GUIDING PRINCIPLES ON FEMINIST LEADERSHIP

**AI Index:** ORG 50/5538/2022

**Author:** Agnes Callamard, Secretary General

### **Aim:**

- The guidelines on feminist leadership are intended to facilitate discussions around how power is distributed and exercised in the organization, including through transparent, collective, collaborative, and accountable decision-making, so as to secure social justice and transformative change.
- This paper is mandated by GA Decision 2021/08.
- The intended outcome is the adoption of a set of guiding principles on feminist leadership for Amnesty International.

### **How to use this paper:**

- This background paper should form the basis of consultations with section members and their boards.

## Contents

<b>I. Background.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>II. What is feminist leadership.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>III. Consultation process .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>IV. Guiding principles for feminist leadership.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>V. In conclusion.....</b>	<b>7</b>

## **I. BACKGROUND**

The Global Strategic Framework (GSF), adopted by the Global Assembly (GA) in 2021, sets out that Amnesty International will “invest in feminist leadership and build trust and power-sharing between and across generations”.

Before the GSF was adopted, two sections brought a motion to the GA (4.2) proposing that the above sentence on feminist leadership be replaced with the following: “We will invest in feminist leadership that identifies injustices, oppressions and facilitates the development of more inclusive and holistic communities. Our leadership will keep issues of gender, race, social class, sexual orientation and ability at the forefront, bring marginalized voices to the centre of the conversation and focus on micro- and macro-level social justice concerns. Our leadership will build trust and power-sharing between and across generations.”

In motion discussion group meetings, participants raised concerns that the proposed replacement text would not provide sufficient clarity on the concept of feminist leadership as included in the GSF. Others also raised concerns that the issue of feminist leadership had become divisive across the movement and highlighted the importance of further discussion to identify synergies.

The GA decided, in decision 2021/08, to initiate a process to identify principles that Amnesty International would adopt on feminist leadership:

*Instructs the International Board to initiate a time-bound process to identify key principles of feminist leadership that Amnesty will adopt in line with the commitment to “invest in feminist leadership and build trust and power sharing between and across generations” as stated in the Global Strategic Framework. This process will involve consultations across the movement and with external experts, respecting differences and building on commonalities of conceptions of feminist leadership across women’s rights and other feminist movements in different parts of the world, and among those addressing intersectional discrimination. It will keep issues of sex, gender, race, social class, sexual orientation and ability at the forefront, bringing marginalized voices to the centre of the conversation and focus on micro- and macro-level social justice concerns. The process will also address operationalisation including resource allocation. The International Board will present the proposed key principles on feminist leadership for Amnesty International to the Global Assembly in 2022.*

These guiding principles provide a pathway for Amnesty International as a movement to build principles of feminist leadership internally throughout its operations. While these principles recognise the need to enshrine feminist leadership across our external work as a movement, that lies outside the scope of this document. The IS will be undertaking a separate exercise in the coming months to develop different aspects of these principles with regards to the external programmatic work.

## **II. WHAT IS FEMINIST LEADERSHIP**

Globally, there is no single definition of feminist leadership. In a seminal work which provides an overview of different approaches to feminist leadership, Srilatha Batliwala, with the India-

based feminist international human rights organization, CREA, cautions against a simplified idea of what feminist leadership is. She notes that it is not possible to “homogenize the feminist discourse – and hence definitions - of leadership, as though there was one single global conversation about it.” Instead, as she and others have pointed out, there have been different debates within and across feminist networks in different regions and countries regarding aspects of organizing and mobilizing for social change leading to diverse concerns and frameworks. Much of this is invisible to mainstream feminist analysis as it was not documented, is not online, or because of language barriers.<sup>1</sup>

However, with these important caveats, there are ideas common to most of the available definitions and approaches to feminist leadership, that are useful for Amnesty to consider as we identify key principles for ourselves.<sup>2</sup>

At heart, feminist leadership is about the exercise of power and it seeks to change the use and practice of power to dismantle systems of oppression, including all forms of violence and exclusion against women, other marginalized genders and racialized people. The purpose of leadership is thus to pursue social justice and realise transformative change. To achieve such objectives, feminist leadership demands that power be identified head-on, including invisible and hidden power, so that power is made visible, democratic, legitimate and accountable.

Many of the definitions and principles include attributes, behaviours, or values and practices, which often focus on inclusivity, collaboration, promoting consensus-building, and valuing and respecting others. Feminist leadership, for instance, demands an awareness of one’s own power, privilege and biases, and a commitment to challenge one’s own bias, and to ensure one’s own power is used in a manner that is legitimate, transparent and accountable.

Over recent years, thanks in part to the work of CREA,<sup>3</sup> the concept of feminist leadership has started to make its way into the social justice sector, with organizations including both Action Aid and Oxfam making a commitment to feminist leadership in their work.

---

<sup>1</sup> Batliwala, S. “Feminist Leadership, Clearing the Conceptual Cloud”, issued by CREA in 2011, at <https://creaworld.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/feminist-leadership-clearing-conceptual-cloud-srilatha-batliwala.pdf>,

<sup>2</sup> See for example, Batliwala, S. “Feminist Leadership, Clearing the Conceptual Cloud”, issued by CREA in 2011, at <https://creaworld.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/feminist-leadership-clearing-conceptual-cloud-srilatha-batliwala.pdf>, and CREA, 2014. Achieving Transformative Feminist Leadership, at: [https://prevention-collaborative.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/CREA\\_2014\\_Achieving-Transformative-Feminist-Leadership.pdf](https://prevention-collaborative.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/CREA_2014_Achieving-Transformative-Feminist-Leadership.pdf); The African Feminist Charter, 2006, at: <https://awdf.org/the-african-feminist-charter/>; JASS, We Rise Toolkit on Feminist Leadership, at: [https://werise-toolkit.org/en/system/tdf/pdf/tools/Feminist-Leadership-Key-Definitions\\_0.pdf?file=1&force=1](https://werise-toolkit.org/en/system/tdf/pdf/tools/Feminist-Leadership-Key-Definitions_0.pdf?file=1&force=1); Fair Share of Women Leaders, resource page on feminist leadership, at: <https://fairsharewomensleaders.org/feministleadership/#:~:text=Feminist%20Leadership%20is%20a%20concept,movements%20in%20the%20Global%20South.&text=Feminist%20Leadership%20at%20its%20most,hierarchical%20leadership%20and%20organisational%20cultures>. This is by no means a comprehensive review and is certainly not intended to be seen as exhaustive.

<sup>3</sup> Fair Share of Women Leaders, resource page on Feminist Leadership, at: <https://fairsharewomensleaders.org/feministleadership/#:~:text=Feminist%20Leadership%20is%20a%20concept,movements%20in%20the%20Global%20South.&text=Feminist%20Leadership%20at%20its%20most,hierarchical%20leadership%20and%20organisational%20cultures>

### III. CONSULTATION PROCESS

**Preparation:** Following the GA decision, the SG's Office initiated contacts with experts in the field, including former staff members, as part of the early development of a discussion paper and an external resource group. Discussions involved external experts, such as representatives from the Center for Reproductive Rights, Atlas, Prospera, WILPF and staff members of the IS and the Coalition Leadership Team, and will be the basis of the broader consultation within the IS and the wider movement. The draft guiding principles also draw upon resources from Gender at Work,<sup>4</sup> CREA,<sup>5</sup> We are Feminist Leaders,<sup>6</sup> AWID,<sup>7</sup> and other groups.

**Internal consultation:** The next steps of the process, in line with the GA decision, include internal consultations in the regional forums and through the policy forums.

**External consultation:** Further consultations will be carried out with a variety of external thought leaders, from different regions, to discuss their view of feminist leadership, their experience of implementing it, and the implications for an organization like Amnesty International.

Special effort will also be made to reach out to feminists of different generations, particularly young feminist activists, and to community-based feminist leaders and women activists. Please provide suggestions on any external experts or activists that we should engage with as part of the consultation.

Based on these internal and external consultations, a draft will be presented for discussion at the motion discussion groups, to ultimately be voted on at the GA.

### IV. GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR FEMINIST LEADERSHIP<sup>8</sup>

1. ***We use our leadership in the service of pursuing social justice and transformative change. We lead by shared vision, clear goals and specific objectives, and not by position or authority alone***

Human rights values inspire how we use our power. We are mindful of the power we hold and of how we use it. We minimize reliance on vertical power, using our human rights goals, and our multidisciplinary support for their achievement, as our shared *raison d'être* as individuals, with our teams, direct reports and in our own reporting lines. We strengthen horizontal relationships across Amnesty to also foster mutual

---

<sup>4</sup> <https://genderatwork.org/>

<sup>5</sup> Fair Share of Women Leaders, resource page on Feminist Leadership, at: <https://fairsharew.org/feministleadership/#:~:text=Feminist%20Leadership%20is%20a%20concept,movements%20in%20the%20Global%20South.&text=Feminist%20Leadership%20at%20its%20most,hierarchical%20leadership%20and%20organisational%20cultures>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.wearefeministleaders.com/about-we-are-feminist-leaders>

<sup>7</sup> [WWW.awid.org](http://WWW.awid.org)

<sup>8</sup> Also see [ActionAid feminist leadership](#) and [Oxfam feminist leadership](#)

accountability for human rights delivery and nurture personal support and professional development. We share leadership and provide opportunities for all colleagues to develop and use their leadership skills, including young leaders. We ensure human rights for all by transforming laws and policies.

**2. *We change the use and practice of power, both formal and invisible, through transparent, collective, collaborative, and accountable decision-making***

We seek to identify any abuse or misuse of power, and to create accountability mechanisms to help us call out and change abusive practices. Our decision-making processes are transparent and collaborative. We report regularly to our colleagues, supervisors, Boards and the International Board, on our use of authority (the decisions we take) and on how we have fulfilled our responsibilities (the results achieved). We are accountable for the power we are entrusted with, acting transparently in its exercise while upholding confidentiality where required.

**3. *We approach diversity and inclusion as essential drivers of who we are and how we are, not only of where we are***

We work in identity-diverse teams, diverse by gender, race, ethnicity, background, experience and age, and more. Where we are not yet diverse, we act to change that within policies and timelines for which we are held accountable. And to make the most of our diversity, we listen actively to each other's experiences, encourage others to do the same, and we change our perspectives accordingly. We promote equality, equity and inclusion, transforming social relations of power that oppress people.

**4. *We take change personally***

Accepting that, in large part, changing the Amnesty work culture for the better is our personal responsibility as Amnesty leaders, we act to change ourselves first and for the benefit of all. We build our self-awareness and challenge our own behaviours. We recognize our vulnerabilities and strengths and value the strengths of others. We appreciate that society gives us and others advantages that are not asked for or earned, based on gender, class, race, sexual orientation, education and other factors. We recognize Amnesty's gaps in prioritizing and addressing gender justice issues hence we want to change ourselves.

**5. *We act to support the wellbeing of others and to sustain our own***

We regularly open discussions with our teams, direct reports and the broader Amnesty movement about steps to maintain and enhance wellbeing. We agree individual work plans with those reporting to us that include a focus on wellbeing, including through forward leave-planning, steps for work/life balance and flexible working arrangements. We model those practices for ourselves, using our own experience as examples to others. We exercise self-care and collective care. We have zero tolerance for and will call out any form of discrimination and abuse of power, including violence, that we see or experience.

**6. *We seek, give and encourage continuous and respectful feedback***

We encourage and provide spaces for mutual feedback, both formal and informal, which focuses not just on work experiences, difficulties and expectations, but also on

emotional and physical wellbeing.

## **V. IN CONCLUSION**

In adopting a set of Guiding Principles for Feminist Leadership, Amnesty International will be able to continue to engage in discussions around how power is distributed and exercised in the organization, including through transparent, collective, collaborative and accountable decision-making, recognizing that feminist leadership is a continuing process, not a destination.

/end