



ROAD TO Justice

Strengthening Women's Human Rights
through Lobbying and Advocacy at the
United Nations Human Rights Council



United Nations and civil society representatives at a side event hosted by the Sexual Rights Initiative in 2018

INTRODUCTION

This case study substantiates CREA's ability to strengthen and cement the voice, visibility, and participation of Global South actors within international decision-making arenas, while garnering support from governments and increasing their understanding of sexual rights issues. In 2006, CREA founded the Sexual Rights Initiative coalition (SRI)¹, the first Global South coalition to advocate for the advancement of human rights in relation to gender and sexuality at the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC). The coalition comprises national, regional, and international organisations, and since its founding has worked to influence UNHRC processes. Since 2018, the coalition has also engaged with UN Treaty Monitoring Bodies.

CONTEXT

During the 38th session of the UNHRC (June - July 2018), the resolution on preventing and responding to violence against women and girls in digital contexts² was tabled. It was the first UN resolution since the Beijing Platform of Action in 1995 to reference bodily autonomy. Recognising the opportunity to push for a more progressive agenda, CREA strategised with other SRI members and lobbied governments for stronger and more progressive language in the resolution. The aim was to ensure that the

language would remain in the resolution and that conservative States would not be able to weaken it across subsequent sessions.

As a first step to developing language for the resolution, CREA convened with SRI members to conduct an analysis of UN documents. The aim was to build our case by first understanding where previous resolutions used progressive language alluding to bodily autonomy. This analysis laid the groundwork for SRI to recommend exact phrasing to the Member State leading the negotiations around the resolution by providing previously agreed-upon language as well as additional phrasing that could push the envelope by establishing newer precedents.

RESULTS

As a result of CREA's advocacy with the lead State and other 'friendly' States, the final resolution more strongly affirmed women's human rights. Specifically, the resolution:

(a) defined violence against women (VAW) more broadly, so that it recognised and included structural factors; and (b) recognised the impact of VAW on bodily autonomy, including in regard to women's ability to make informed and autonomous decisions regarding their sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights.

EXPERTISE AND EFFECTIVENESS

As a founding member of SRI and key Global South actor within the broader feminist movement, CREA played a significant role ensuring that SRI is seen as an expert contributing to the resolutions against VAW. In fact, Canada — the Member State that leads the resolution — explicitly requested that SRI assist in preparation of the draft. On several occasions during the 38th session, CREA, with other SRI representatives, was also approached by a number of other Member States for specific proposals to strengthen the resolution.

EVALUATION AND LEARNING CAPACITY

CREA continuously assesses the needs of SRI and strategises around how to amplify the coalition's impact. SRI's activities at the 38th session fed into broader international fora, including other UNHRC resolutions, reports of UN Special Rapporteurs, Independent Experts and Working Groups, and though this, it also influenced — and continues to influence — governments' policies. This continuity in messaging contributes to sustainable attention to women's rights and sexual and gender rights in these fora, especially as they relate to the needs of marginalised women.

TRANSPARENCY, ACCOUNTABILITY & PUBLIC SUPPORT

Facilitating the participation of Global South actors within UNHRC processes and Treaty Monitoring Bodies has been an important means of bringing diverse voices that otherwise get left out of advocacy spaces and conversations. As part of SRI, CREA has done this successfully for over 15 years. We have collaborated with more than 300 activists from the Global South to submit reports to the Universal Periodic Review mechanism, deliver oral statements, present reports to Special Procedures, and lobby with States at the UNHRC. Through periodic reflections, CREA and SRI share their learnings with each other, which in turn helps bolster the accountability of both parties. These reflections have also successfully garnered insights on how to support capacity development of local activists, networks, and gender and sexual rights organisations, so that they can represent

themselves more effectively and build powerful alliances and networks.

KNOWLEDGE AND ADDED VALUE

CREA's specific contribution to the language in the resolution pertained to its input around sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), as it relates to bodily autonomy. CREA brought to the table a holistic and inclusive outlook toward women's rights, sexual- and gender-based violence, and sexual rights. These perspectives and knowledge were drawn from CREA's engagement in and with Global South advocacy conversations, including with activists, women's rights organisations and networks, and government representatives.

INCLUSIVE APPROACH

CREA's approach to inclusivity is that of intersectionality, which was reflected during the aforementioned process. Many times, women's control over their own bodies and ability to make decisions is hindered due to violence or the threat of violence. Hence, although the resolution concerned violence against women, CREA was able to refer to SRHR as it relates to all women and the violence they face.

SUSTAINABILITY

Success in gaining the inclusion of language that respects women's and sexual rights in a resolution creates massive precedent that can be built on and expanded in the future. Once integrated, the same provision can also be used in other resolutions, as it is negotiated text and agreed-upon language. Ultimately, this can be leveraged for national-level lobbying and advocacy.

1 SRI Coalition consists of Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR), Egypt; Akahata Equipo de Trabajo en Sexualidades y Generos, Latin America; Coalition of African Lesbians, South Africa; Federation for Women and Family Planning, Poland; Action Canada for Population and Development (ACPD), Canada.

2 https://ap.ohchr.org/documents/dpage_e.aspx?si=A/HRC/38/L.6



ABOVE CREA co-convoked a session on Reimagining Movement Building at the Conference of State Parties in 2019 . The session centered around inclusive definitions of marginalisation

COVER IMAGE Participants at the Sexual Rights Initiative Retreat held in Ottawa in 2018



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CREA builds feminist leadership, advances women's human rights, and expands sexual and reproductive freedoms.

Founded in 2000, CREA is a feminist human rights organisation based in the Global South, led by Southern feminists, which works at the grassroots, national, regional, and international levels.