



Human rights issues and Gender Equality: A complex intersection in Pakistani society

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Abstract

Pakistan is a diverse society with complex socio-political & religious dynamics. At the heart of these complex dynamics lies the issues of human rights & gender equality. Human rights are broadly debated across the developed world as well as in third-world countries. Gender equality is one of the contemporary issues of human rights. With a vast potential of 51% of the women population, Pakistan is yet to cultivate its half share of the population into human capital & enhance its human development index. However, the issues of gender disparity lies from the political sphere to the social & economic aspects of Pakistani society. The research based on secondary data analyzes the gender disparity, gender underdevelopment, and gender-based violence in the society & relates it to the issue of human rights violations in Pakistani society. The research finds that there is a high degree of gender inequality in society. Gender undevelopment is a real problem in society despite active law-making and resource allocation. Gender-based violence is a crucial form of fundamental violation of human rights in society.

Introduction

Pakistan has more than 240 million people. There is a clear political, social-religious, and cultural diversity in the country. Pakistan's governance system is a mix of a parliamentary system of government and Islamic law, although parties and the military have a major role in government affairs. The vast majority of the people in Pakistan are Muslims (about 96%), there are also Hindus, Christians, and others. Islam, is central to political and social organization and life. This religious influence generally impacts either the law or culture (Britannica, 2024).

Pakistan's politics has been alternating between democracy and military rule, where the military has been playing an essential part in its governing process after the formal independence of Pakistan in 1947 (Muhammad, 2013). However, Pakistan shares the characteristics of many third-world countries, such as fast-growing connectivity, social interaction, urbanization and modernization processes, which in turn frequently leads to the clash of cultures. On one hand,

traditional values and, on the other – rather liberal and progressive attitudes. This is often seen in the case of human rights issues, especially women’s rights. Religious fundamentalism and traditions of some tribes is still a big problem to the advancement of women’s rights and the protection of all people’s rights. In rural areas of Pakistan, women are socialized in traditional gender roles of staying at homes (Bank W. , 2023)

Human Rights and Gender Equality status in Pakistan

Human rights, according to the United Nations, are the entitlement of individuals simply by their being humans. These are rights to life, liberty, equality, and justice. Several international human rights instruments categorize gender mainstreaming as an important human right that requires the treatment of people without distinction of their sex (Nations, 1948). It is, however, sad that Pakistan, being a member of the international and national forum on gender equality, has fallen way behind many countries in tackling gender-based disparities.

It would be relevant to say that making gender equality a reality in Pakistan is significant on any index. Pakistan is home to more than 51% of its women’s population, but they are still not active enough in terms of participation in major sectors of the society, including political activities and economic sectors or any essential decision-making. The World Economic Forum’s Global Gender Gap Report 2023 shows that Pakistan is at 153rd out of 156 developed and developing nations in the gender equity index (Forum, 2023). This gap continues in terms of political, economic, and social areas, and women encounter barriers and violence. The importance of doing away with gender disparities is that the creation of power for women should be supported together with the development of Pakistan as a whole. Women can be given such power that can increase development of the economy, index of Human Development, and lower the rates of poverty (Bank, Pakistan overview, n.d.). SDG 5 of the United Nations means for the promotion of gender equality and the equal rights of all women and girls. The CEDAW¹ makes the importance of gender equality clearer that the country ratified in 1996 (Rights., n.d.)

Defining Concepts

Human Rights are natural rights that people possess without discriminating on their nationality, color, sex, or race. They include but are not limited to the right to life, liberty and personal integrity, equality, education, and non-discrimination rights. Analyzing the concept of human rights in terms of the Pakistani context, it is worthy of mentioning that the most visible problems are the violations of women and their rights; they are discriminated against systematically in all spheres of life, including political, economic, social, and even reproductive.

Gender Equality means that there are no distinctions between males and females as to who can do what, where, when, with what resources, and under what conditions. This, therefore, implies that men and women will have the same abilities to both participate in and gain from social, political, and economic endeavors. Sex equality is not sameness but an equitable chance for both male and female persons to realize their optimum potential regardless of their sex. The Gender Equality Index (GEI) and Gender Development Index (GDI) are two international indexes by which gender equality and gender-related inequity all over the world are measured, including in the case of Pakistan. As per the UNDP Human Development Index Report, 2020, the high gender inequality index score in Pakistan translates into a poor gender development index, the country lying at the lowermost rank, indicative of the settled disparities in health, education, and earnings between male and female populations (Programme, n.d.)

¹ CEDAW stands for the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women adopted by UN General Assembly in 1979.

Gender Equality and its Connection to Human Rights

Gender equality and human rights are intertwined since human rights themselves are formulated based on the equal worth of everyone. Gender equality is believed to be one of the accomplishments of human rights. The United Nations Human Rights Council set out that gender equality is not only the right of any society but also the key to advancing social and economic development. Poor women's education and health only mean bad things for the rest of society, or when women get the same chances as men to be educated, get proper healthcare, and work, then everyone profits. Gender equality leads to the increased political together with improved storm cohesiveness as well as economic future.

In Pakistan, thus, gender discrimination exists while the constitution of the country promises equal rights to every citizen. Art 12 of the Pakistani Constitution (1973) states that there is equality before the law, and no person can be discriminated against based on her gender. However, certain traditional cultural and socio-economic inequalities have created a male chauvinist society, where women are law and systemically deprived of their rights.

Human Rights and Gender Equality Frameworks Internationally

The fight for human rights has been a worldwide movement that has offered enormous frameworks that seek to enhance the plight of women. Interestingly, the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 proclaims that 'all people are born and remain free and equal in dignity and rights' (UDHR 1948, P. 1). Although gender equality is not stated clearly in the UDHR, the document has been interpreted as demanding for the eradication of discrimination in all its forms- gender discrimination inclusive. CEDAW, otherwise known as the 'International Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination of Women' or 'Women's Charter,' was adopted by the United Nations in 1979 and is one of globally the most extensive Human rights instruments that mainly seeks to eliminate Discrimination of women. Pakistan joined CEDAW in 1996, which assures the country to eliminate discrimination against women and take measures to eradicate discrimination against women (Nations, Committee on the elimination of discrimination against women , n.d.).

CEDAW clearly states that Pakistan has legal obligations to eradicate discriminating laws and policies that affect women to entertain their rights and protection against violence. Nevertheless, Pakistan is a signatory to these frameworks, and still, the issue of gender-based violence and inequality persists in the country.

Also the Beijing Platform for Action (1995) also owns and deepens Gender mainstreaming by identifying key measures to promote women's rights in education, health care, and political and economic spheres. Another evidence of Pakistan's commitment on the international level to gender equality is its subscription to this platform; however, some difficulties have been seen in relating it at the national level.

Gender related concerns in Pakistan.

A major part of women in Pakistan participate in the workforce, but they are not able to operate up to their potential. As per the data from the World Bank in 2022, Pakistan's women labor force participation is 22%, which is below the global women labor force participation ratio of 47% (Bank, Labor force participation rate, female (% of total population ages 15+) - Pakistan, n.d.). Due to poor education standards, limited vocational training, and lack of economic opportunities, many women are left worse and economically dependent on their male counterparts to contribute to the national economy.

This article identifies the lack of opportunities for women's employment and low representation in political and policy-making positions in Pakistan as a constraint to the

development of Pakistan. The Human Development Report of 2020 shows that countries that invest in gender equality have better economic and human development. This proves that the encouragement of women is very important in times of need since reducing gender disparities can enhance the economy, erase poverty, and promote society's advancement (Programme., 2022).

One of the most significant problems is the role played by culture and, or society in supporting gender-biased measures. Negative cultural beliefs, including early marriage, early motherhood, and cheap value accorded to women's education, decline women to social pull or mobility statuses. According to these challenges, it has become inevitable to understand the status of women to change with social policy reforms and reforms in society for a better future in Pakistan. The World Bank's 2020 report on gender embraced different aspects of gender equality, increased female education, and alteration of our attitudes towards women, as well as the doorways we provide them to, which are the main fundamentals of social mobility for women (Bank, Gender overview, n.d.).

Problem Statement:

Gender inequality is a persistent issue in a country like Pakistan where gender based discrimination, violence & gender underdevelopment is shaped by multifaceted factors. The research puzzle is to unearth diverse factors that shaped the gender based issues and making them a debated of fundamental human rights violations. It analyzed the issues of gender underdevelopment that sinks the indicators of human development, human rights and gender equality in Pakistan.

Research Questions:

1. What are socio- political and religious factors that shapes the dynamics of gender equality in Pakistan?
2. How gender based violence causes gender underdevelopment in diverse societies like Pakistan?

Research Objectives

The gender disparity, underdevelopment, and violence are effectively going to be looked at as violations of Pakistan's human rights in this research paper. The objectives of this research include:

- Gender inequalities in the political, economic & social scenario of Pakistan.
- Analyzing the constraints to gender development, especially in education, health, and wealth.
- A study on the nature and extent of gender-based violence as a major human rights abuse.
- Analyzing the gap between the formulation of laws and the actual realization of gender equality policies in the Pakistani context.
- Explaining what things should be done to end gender disparities as well as enhance human rights in the country.

Theoretical Framework:

This article analyzes the gender inequality issues on the pivot of Liberal Feminism that aims to identify the gender gaps between men and women and seeks to eliminate them. It calls for emphasize on achieving gender equality through social, political & legal reforms within the system of liberal democracy, promoting equality, social justice for all by reforming laws, norms and structures. Analyzing through the context of Pakistan, this article focuses on social norms and religious fundamentalism as a root cause of gender discrimination in Pakistan. It aims to pave the way to call out social stigmas, reformation of norms, laws and complex dynamics of gender based violence to found an egalitarian society with protection of human rights

Literature Review:

Many scholars have discussed the relationship between gender discrimination and human rights abuses in Pakistan and the social, political, legal, and cultural determinants of gender discrimination. There is a large volume of literature that points to the pervasively high rates of GBV in Pakistan; it ranges from domestic violence and honor killings to sexual harassment. The WHO also reports that gender-based violence is rife in Pakistan, and an estimated seven out of every ten women will likely experience some form of violence at some point in their lives, with the violence spanning from intimate partner violence to workplace harassment (Organization, 2024).

Another relevant area of gender inequality is women's political engagement. Females have traditionally served in negligible numbers in Pakistan's politics, although the Pakistan constitution has endorsed equality of the sexes. Pakistan has been ranked very low in the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report regarding women's employment in government; women constitute barely about 20 percent of Pakistan's National Assembly. This is, however, true while most women have risen to top echelon positions, such as the office of the Prime Minister and that of the Speaker of the National Assembly, there are still few women in the political arena nowadays, and rarely are they selected (Forum, World Economic, 2010).

Another area that has quite revealed equal representation of the sexes is economic participation. Pakistan holds the sets of 153 ranking nong out of 156 countries as per the Global Gender Gap Index report of the World Economic Forum (2023) in the areas of economic participation and opportunity for women (Forum, Global Gender Gap Report 2023, 2023). This poor ranking is an indication of the restricted economic opportunities women have, mainly in rural settings. Women in Pakistan suffer from unfair employment opportunities and wage discrimination, followed by the adverse situation of loan and credit discrimination, which results in their economic exclusion.

Also, the areas of education and healthcare provision appear to remain a dream for women in Pakistan. The issue of girls' education has been one of polemics for many years now, especially among rural and tribal communities where cultures and beliefs, early marriages, and dropping out of school are eminent adversaries to girls' education. The UNICEF report in 2020 shows that Pakistan stands second in South Asia in the number of girls who do not attend school, with a figure of over 5.5 million (UNICEF, 2020). Even when girls are able to attend school, they are forced to drop out through early marriages or forced to do house chores.

The paper also highlights a study of the legal and socio-political culture of Pakistan that shows the country's support of human rights international conventions but lack of translating the laws in favor of gender equality. That is, although Pakistan has made some legal reforms toward women, such as the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act 2012 and Protection Against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act 2010, the effectiveness of these laws is limited due to no political will, poor judiciary system and feudal /patriarchal culture of the society.

Methodology

This research article adopts a qualitative research method, analyzed based on secondary data to explore gender disparity, underdevelopment, and Gender-based Violence as forms of human rights violations in Pakistan. The published data consisting of articles in academic journals, bulletins, newsletters, government documents, and records, as well as publications of international organizations and NGOs, were used in this article.

Data Sources:

Academic Articles A list of journals and books available in identified libraries and consumed in the research of gender inequality and human rights in Pakistan. Government Reports From Pakistan Human Rights Ministry and Economic Survey from Pakistan. International and NGO Reports US and Internationally based Human Rights organizations that include UN Women, Human Rights Watch, and The Aurat Foundation. News websites that focus on reporting cases of gender-based violence and other policy changes.

Limitations:

This study is restricted by the nature of secondary data and the reliability of those data, especially in rural contexts, and some of the sources may contain bias.

Analysis and Discussion

This section analyses the trends in gender inequality with specific reference to civil rights in Pakistan and the areas of gender divide, underemployment, and gender violence. Gender inequality in Pakistan exists in different dimensions of political, economic, and social life. Women have a very insignificant representation in political office; although our constitution provides for the quota system of women's representation in the National Assembly, only 20% are women. This political marginalization reduces the ability of women to participate in the decision-making of the nation (Pakistan, 2024).

In the economic domain, sexual stereotypes are sharply illustrated; women are discriminated against at the workplace, gaps in wage differences between male and female workers, and underemployment. According to the World Bank findings, women are paid between 30-40% less than their male counterparts for the same job (Bank, Gender overview, n.d.). These rights include women having little or no access to property, especially land and credit, according to their economic status.

Corporate structures and life in Pakistan, strongly influenced by patriarchal values, also play a role in gender underdevelopment. The issues addressed are women education and health. UNESCO also points out that only 65% of Pakistan's rural women complete primary schooling, while 85% of boys (UNESCO, 2024). Healthcare for women is also deficient; for example, maternal mortality stands at 140 deaths per 100,000 live births (Organization, Maternal mortality, 2024).

Cultural, Religious, and Socio-Political Factors

The impact of gender inequality and human rights violations in Pakistan cannot be analyzed without emphasis on the culture and religion in the society. In the Pakistani context, social practices and relations are male-dominated hierarchy where men and women are demeaned and predestined to perform specific kinds of duties. There are many traditions where women are defined by the subservient roles they have within the household, especially in public and economic arenas they are limited in their freedom. Furthermore, religious conservative traditions in Pakistan, especially in remote areas, continue to place restrictions on women's opportunities to choose and be mobile.

Recent years have also witnessed some progressive political actions on demand for women's rights about male-dominated actions and policies across the country that civil society organizations and most international organizations have supported. But they are met with opposition from traditional elements, hence the two extremes in whether women should be given greater rights or not in Pakistan.

Violence against women and girls continues to be one of the worst forms of human rights violations in Pakistan. The majority of them reported that about sixty-seven percent of women have, in one way or the other, undergone violence in their lifetime, this includes domestic

violence, honor killings, and sexual harassment. The Aurat Foundation has estimated that some 4,000 women have been honor killed in the last ten years in Pakistan. The main causes that make GBV continue are deemed patriarchal mentalities, lack of police enforcement, and culture that supports those practices. Combating GBV entails a full-scale change of the cultural perception together with legal safeguards for women against abuse (WHO, 2024).

Such laws include the Protection against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act (2010), and the Domestic Violence Act (2020), amongst others. However, there is a gap between the formulation of such laws and their enforcement. Cultural and social cover, together with inadequate resources and politics, will lead to poor implementation of formulated laws on gender equality. Despite efforts to achieve the delivery of justice, women still have to encounter challenges because of being retaliated against and unsupported by police forces.

The male/female ratio in Pakistan has become a political, economic, and social issue, and cultural repercussions are behind it as well. This paper maintains that the inability to develop women, mainly in education and healthcare, poses a constraint to national development. Gender-based violence is still a common violation of women's rights; this is alongside weak law enforcement and social acceptance of the vice. Solving these problems involves not only changes in law but also challenges to the culture to improve women's rights and respect for gender equality.

Key Findings

- 1. Persistent Gender Inequality:** The gender disparity continues to persist at the political, economic, and social levels in the context of Pakistan. While there are legal requirements on how many women should be elected as leaders, women occupy only about 20 percent of the National Assembly seats. Socially, women suffer discrimination in areas like wage disparity, unemployment, and restricted access to financial means and employment chances. This is due to the denial of deserving rights to land, credit, and training that check women's contribution to the economy. There must be gender balance Parliament, Parties and Cabinet.
- 2. Underdevelopment of Women's Potential:** The role of women's education and health care, including childbearing and child-rearing, is still restricted in the country, especially in the rural setting. Literacy, girls' and boys' schooling, basic schooling, and Education have also shown small improvements over the years. However, differences remain in the literacy and primary, secondary, and high education enrolments between the genders, especially in the rural areas. Women's healthful involvement at the healthcare center, and especially in the reproductive and maternal health sectors, is hindered significantly by social, economic, and infrastructure-related factors. They also help to confine women within the bounds of the manmade barriers so that they cannot help drive the society or economy forward by contributing to the workforce.
- 3. Gender-Based Violence (GBV):** GBV is one of the most prevalent human rights abuses in Pakistan. Effects of Violence against women, including wife battering, honor killings, sexual harassment, and forced marriages continue. Sexual Violence is currently on the rise due to cultural traditions that view women as inferior, weak institutional frameworks that minimize cases of the police addressing these cases, and poor access to support structures. Lack of safe spaces, lack of legal assistance for survivors, and a lack of provisions for mental healthcare only make the problem worse. Gender-based violence is not only a violation of women's human rights but also hinders their full social and economic reintegration.

- 4. Weak Implementation of Gender Equality Laws:** Even though Pakistan has passed new laws that allow women's rights and gender equality, such as the Protection Against Harassment at the Workplace Act of 2010, the implementation of these laws is very poor. Because of other factors, including inadequate political will, social opposition, and insufficient funds being accorded to enforcing legal provisions, there is a wide chasm between adopting legal standards and enforcing those laws. In controlling cultures, especially in rural areas, women still have a challenge when trying to seek justice.

Recommendations

- 1. Strengthen Legal and Policy Frameworks:** To eliminate the issues of gender inequalities, Pakistan needs to improve the structures of enforcement of the gender hardship laws. More resources should be provided to the government to make sure that general laws that protect women's rights, as are represented in the Domestic Violence Act and the Sexual Harassment Act, are implemented. There is a need to bolster the capability of police and the courts in the successful prosecution of all matters touching on gender, with efficiency in the enforcement process and also embrace more transparency and accountability in the process. There is also a need for more new legislation that can address such unique issues that are not captured under the current laws as cyber harassment and trafficking. There is a need of more women in public, political, social and legal sphere.
- 2. Enhance Political and Economic Empowerment of Women:** It is a necessity for the growing women's representation in decision-making positions and officials, not only in politics but also in business. Although the political quota system helped to open a door for some representation, further effective and intensive measures should be directed to advance the quality and intensity of women's representation in leadership positions, especially at the subnational level. Further, there ought to be economic integration policies that provide for equal remuneration for equal working, equal access to credit facilities and the ownership of equal freedoms of land and property, and equal access to employment opportunities, particularly for women in the suburban regions. There is also the need for strengthening the education and training programs for entrepreneurship and skills, as well as microfinancing aimed additionally at making women more financially secure.
- 3. Foster Societal Change through Education and Awareness:** It is very unfortunate, but cultural and societal factors are primarily at the center of Gender inequality in Pakistan. To address the former, short-term remedial measures are required, whereas long-term structural changes are needed for the latter two. Education for Gender should be part and parcel of any school curriculum to help change attitudes towards the injustice faced by women. Anti-female traditional practices education should include fighting female gender dangerous cultural taboos, including early marriage, honor killings, and domestic violence. Gender-sensitive community programs that aim to increase women's self-reliance and work with men and boys can help to change gender attitudes. Awareness campaigns, outreach programs and human rights education is a must for real change in the society.
- 4. Combat Gender-Based Violence at the Grassroots Level:** There should be a change of law and policy, increased institutional, community, and individual responses, civil society activism, as well as public awareness and education on this issue of gender-based violence. The results showed that [transition word here] Pakistan has to improve the existing support structures for survivors of violence. These facets of the problem include adding more shelters as well as providing advocacy services and mental health treatment.

People of the community need to be involved in the fight against GBV through the use of actions such as raising awareness among women and other members of society regarding their rights alongside the effects of violence in families and society. The police force in any country and the judiciary should be trained on courtesy, or rather sensitivity to the female gender, since they are prone to violence and deserve a capable arm of the law that will act with dispatch.

5. Promote Gender-Sensitive Development Policies: Mainstreaming Gender in all sectors of education, health, and economic activities of the nation is crucial to the development of Uganda. Needy women must also be given a chance to be educated, as the government of Uganda has failed to fund the provision of education in rural areas. To reduce the gap, scholarships and incentives to complete girls' education and expansion of vocational training could be made. In healthcare, reproductive health services, particularly those related to the welfare of women, necessarily require augmentation: these services should address rural health needs and help healthcare professionals be more sex-sensitive.

Conclusion

Human rights, gender equality, and equity issues in Pakistan, therefore, form not only the moral ethic and social justice agenda but also the condition that defines Pakistan's future and its growth. Despite the limited improvements achieved in the last decade, the existing dysfunctions remain a constant feature of the treatment of women in society, and gender inequality is still firmly rooted in the social and political, as well as economic and cultural attitudes typical for the Alimentary country. However, even though Pakistan has made progressive strides in law on women's rights – like the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Bill, Protection Against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act, Amendments in the inheritance laws, and others, the gender-sensitive still pose hurdles in the way of women empowering the nation who constitutes about 51% of the population.

The continuation of the gender disparity is most evident in the political, economic as well as social realms. In political leadership, women are underrepresented, but affirmative laws have been enacted that seek to findings to increase the percentage of women leaders, but these women do not have much decisional power. Economically, women are marginalized because they earn less than men and remain in poorly paid sectors or low-level employment, and the bulk of them are employed in the informal sector, and their access to such macro-resources as land, credit, and business opportunities is limited. Equally, educational inequalities, especially in rural settings, prevent women from such brackets for individual and career development, hence promoting poverty and underdevelopment.

At the societal level, GBV is one of the most pressing and prevalent humanitarian issues. Dowry deaths, female genital mutilation, wife beating, rape within marriage, and other forms of violence against women remain rampant, and because there are no strong legal protections for women, many women are victims of violence with little recourse to protection or escape. The above forms of violence not only infringe on women's basic human rights but also have dire consequences on the health of women. They also erode unity and lag the country's development by denying women the right to employment, voting, and social life.

However, gender equality provides a sound development agenda for the country and the world at large. Several scholarly studies have revealed that women and girls' education, health investment, and economic enfranchisement yield higher economic returns, better social development, and good health everywhere. Women in Pakistan may not require emancipation based on principles of justice and fairness; they need equity to realize the full potential of

Pakistan's human capital. If proper support is being provided, then the women of Pakistan can highly contribute towards the progress of the economy of the country. Success, reduction of poverty, and job opportunities in Pakistan can be rapidly seen if only the issues affecting half of the population, most especially education and employment, are eliminated.

Furthermore, the struggle for women's rights can be sharply connected with the problem of human rights and liberation. Women also enjoy equal rights to men, any society that neglects to protect women's rights puts into practice and fosters discrimination and unfairness in society. The law and policies efficacy is clear, but they are not enough if there is no powerful enforcement or no cultural shift. It has to be clear that only combined efforts starting from the state apparatus and finishing up with non-governmental organizations should ensure the comprehensive legal, social, and cultural transformation that would recognize women's rights, prevent violence, and guarantee equal chances for each citizen.

Elimination of gender disparity still presents a challenge in Pakistan, hence the need to approach the issue in the following ways. Policy-makers need, therefore, to strive hard in the implementation of gender-related legal provisions, and force should be provided for the implementation of these laws. Feminization of politics and economic spheres requires more efforts, as well as changes in education, which should be endowed with conditions for the successful education of girls and boys. The positive change of existing cultures that allow for gender-based violence requires the promotion of campaigns to change such cultures.

There is no doubt that the road map towards women's emancipation in Pakistan is dotted, but it is not an uphill task. It involves everyone: government, civil society, businesses, and communities if there's to be a positive move towards overcoming gender-biased systems and acknowledging the rights of women. Hence, gender equality in Pakistan will not only provide women of the country with better opportunities but also create a fair, efficient, and prosperous future for the whole country. The work done towards gender equality will help bring a society that fully observes human rights and where people of all genders can reach their full potential.

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