

# OPEN LETTER

## TO HIS EXCELLENCY EMMANUEL MACRON, PRESIDENT OF THE FRENCH REPUBLIC

Mr. President,

We, the undersigned, feminist and women's and young women's rights organizations,

**Congratulate** France for its commitment to women's rights and the feminist cause through the adoption of France's International Strategy for Equality between Women and Men 2018-2022<sup>1</sup>;

**Appreciate** France's ambition to implement *a development policy to achieve SDG n°5 by 2030: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls*<sup>2</sup>;

**Welcome** President Macron's initiative to disburse the "**Support Fund for Feminist Organizations (SFFO)**" of 120 million euros over three years to support feminist movements working for gender equality<sup>3</sup>;

**Salute** France's promotion of feminist diplomacy, and in particular the French Development Agency (FDA), which places gender equality at the center of its social commitments<sup>4</sup>;

**Applaud** the FDA's call for projects "**Support for feminist organizations in the South**" for an amount of 15 million euros, the first disbursement of this support to feminist organizations<sup>5</sup>;

**Appreciate** the FDA's recognition of the vital importance of *"supporting the feminist associative movement in the South as a fundamental lever for achieving this ambition on equality between women and men"*<sup>6</sup>;

**Congratulate** the FDA for its *"dual objective of (i) financing small CSOs [civil society organizations] that are currently not eligible for other windows, for such high amounts, and (ii) financing the most relevant structures and projects"*<sup>7</sup>;

**Look forward** to the forthcoming and second disbursement of 40 million euros and which its modalities are currently under discussions with French CSOs and women's groups;

Mr. President,

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<sup>1</sup> Multi-country call for projects file - Support for feminist organizations in the South 2020, p. 27

<sup>2</sup> Multi-country call for projects file - Support for feminist organizations in the South 2020, p. 27

<sup>3</sup> Multi-country call for projects file - Support for feminist organizations in the South 2020, p. 28

<sup>4</sup> Multi-country call for projects file - Support for feminist organizations in the South 2020, p. 28

<sup>5</sup> Multi-country call for projects file - Support for feminist organizations in the South 2020, p.1

<sup>6</sup> Multi-country call for projects file - Support for feminist organizations in the South 2020, p.29

<sup>7</sup> Multi-country call for projects file - Support for feminist organizations in the South 2020, p. 34

We, the undersigned, feminist and women's and young women's rights organizations,

**Concerned**, however, by the many conditionalities linked to the management of this first grant of 15 million euros which greatly restricts the number and type of organization that can qualify to manage these funds;

**Note** that the financial criterion by which the organization carrying out the project or the leader of the consortium "*must . . . present an average annual budget equal to or greater than 5 million euros*"<sup>8</sup> **eliminates the majority of feminist and women's and young women's rights organizations working in developing countries, including most Women's Funds;**

**Highlight** that in the past **high thresholds such as these have worked against a government's well-intentioned objective of supporting feminist movements in the Global South.** One stark example in recent years is the Dutch Funding Leadership and Opportunities for Women (FLOW) program which was a direct successor of the MDG3 Fund. *In the second round of funding (FLOW II), it came across a classic 'stumbling block': setting eligibility requirements that most Women's Rights Organizations (WROs) could not meet, such as a minimum grant of 5 million euros. Proposals selected for a grant were submitted by Dutch and international civil society organizations, most of which had a gender equality and women's rights focus in their activities but are not themselves women's organizations or movements. In response to strong critical feedback from feminist movements followed by an amendment in Parliament, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) set up a new funding program, Leading from the South. It also changed the eligibility criteria for the FLOW successor, Power of Women, to exclusively support WROs. Via open calls for proposals in different languages, Leading from the South, managed through four regional women's funds, provides smaller grants and core funding support exclusively to feminist groups and WROs working at the regional, national, and grassroots levels in the Global South*<sup>9</sup>;

**Emphasize that the risk that feminist organizations will not access quality grants from this first round of funding is real** because as you so well recognized in the call for projects: "*[They] are often small structures that are not intended to grow. Only a small majority of young feminist organizations are declared, either by choice or by difficulty*"<sup>10</sup>. Indeed, AWID's [research](#), published in 2013, highlights that the average annual budget of women's rights organizations was 20,000 USD (16.850 euros)<sup>11</sup> and there is little evidence to believe that this situation has significantly changed since. Moreover, there is no doubt that the feminist and women's rights groups led by young women, and working on intersectional issues or issues considered "controversial" – such as sexual and reproductive health and rights (an issue prioritized in the FDA call) - have even smaller annual budgets;

**Note** that autonomous feminist movements have been proven repeatedly to be the most important factor in achieving lasting change for women's rights. If France wants to have a significant impact in this area, a significant investment directly in favor of these movements is necessary;

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<sup>8</sup> Multi-country call for projects file - Support for feminist organizations in the South 2020, p. 3

<sup>9</sup> Excerpt from the AWID's forthcoming report

<sup>10</sup> Multi-country call for projects file - Support for feminist organizations in the South 2020, p. 31

<sup>11</sup> Arutyunova, A. et Clark, C. (2013). *Watering the Leaves, Starving the Roots*, AWID. Retrieved from: <https://www.awid.org/publications/watering-leaves-starving-roots>.

**Mr. President,**

We, the undersigned, feminist and women's and young women's rights organizations,

**Concerned** by the manner in which the FDA defined 'feminist organizations' in the June 25th, 2020 Meeting report: "These may be structures that work in the field of women's rights and inequalities, but also structures that work on the themes from the call for projects (Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, Gender-Based Violence, Women's Economic Empowerment). It is not because the NGO [Non-Governmental Organization] is not labeled feminist that they cannot be funded if they do work in the areas of intervention outlined in the call for projects. It is up to the consortium to select the most pertinent actors."

For us within the feminist movements, the terms 'feminist movements' and 'women's rights organizations' are used interchangeably to refer to groups that:

- Work from a feminist and/or women's rights perspective;
- Are led by the people they serve;
- Have the promotion of women's, girl's, and/or trans people's human rights as their primary mission, and not just as part of their programs;
- Push for structural change for women and girls;
- and work on issues that are marginalized and/or contested.

CSOs and international NGOs (INGOs) whose missions are not grounded in feminist and/or women's rights perspectives are different actors. They also have a part to play in the fight for gender equality, however, it is not the same, as women's rights organizations and feminist movements. They may do gender-related programming or include a feminist lens in some areas, but it does not constitute their core mission. Moreover, they do not do locally based, self-led feminist work, and importantly, they are not part of, or accountable to, feminist movements. At best, they can be allies to feminist movements; at worst, they compete with them for funding and/or push an agenda that is reformist rather than one that aims to secure structural change for all women, girls, and trans people (Source: AWID);

**Mr. President,**

**Considering** that over the last decade, feminist and women's and young women's rights organizations received [less than 1% of Official Development Assistance \(ODA\) that focused on gender equality<sup>12</sup>](#) and more importantly that [three-quarters of ODA funding does not leave bilateral development agencies<sup>13</sup>](#), circulating instead into the agencies' gender programming; the remaining money which is allocated outside of development agencies goes almost entirely to larger CSOs and INGOs—the vast majority based in the Global North;

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<sup>12</sup> Staszewka, K., Dolker, T. et Miller, K. (2019, Jul 2). *Only 1% of gender equality funding is going to women's organisations – why ?* Retrieved from: <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2019/jul/02/gender-equality-support-1bn-boost-how-to-spend-it>

<sup>13</sup> OECD DAC Network on Gender Equality (GENDERNET). (2016). *Donor support to Southern women's rights organisations*, OECD Findings. Récupéré de : <https://www.oecd.org/dac/gender-development/OECD-report-on-womens-rights-organisations.pdf>

**Stress** that it is ever more important that France's commitment to invest 120 million euros into feminist initiatives over the next three years achieves its stated objectives and truly reaches WROs and feminist groups in the Global South;

**Mr. President,**

We, the undersigned, feminist and women's and young women's rights organizations,

**Request** that the grant package which will be reallocated to organizations through the first call as well as all subsequent calls, **justly** integrates institutional costs linked with the management of recipient organizations;

**Ask** that a similar criterion be incorporated into the grant allocation guidelines of the consortium or organization which will be selected to manage the future funds of 40 million euros to cover the institutional costs of the recipient organizations, costs which are as equally important as those of international organizations;

**Note** that the funds released through the first call for projects "Support for feminist organizations in the South" **represent project funds rather than general support funds** since they specify the amount to be administered by budget line, which does not give beneficiary organizations the latitude to make changes to budget lines in the event of an unforeseen change of context;

**Affirm** that what feminist organizations want, and need are quality, multi-year, flexible and self-MANAGED financial resources for their initiatives; and

**Therefore**, ask the FDA and the French government to ensure that the consortium that has been selected to manage this first fund as well as the entity that will manage future funds, properly integrates this criterion into their final proposals;

**Request** additionally that similarly to the ongoing consultations with French CSOs, **consultations be set up with feminist organizations in FDA partner countries** to give them the opportunity to provide inputs into the design of the funding modalities for the remaining amount left of the 120 million euros promised. This would make the entire process more participatory – and maybe it could even become a participatory grantmaking. Moreover, this would undoubtedly increase France's accountability to the groups it is aiming to support;

**Call** for a mechanism to be put in place to monitor and ensure the correct implementation of the directives specified by the FDA and the French government. This mechanism could be a monitoring committee composed mainly of leaders of women's and young women's organizations, a committee thus representative of the target population of this initiative;

**Call** on the FDA and the French government to ensure that the selection process of the beneficiary organizations of these funds does not leave any women's and young women's organizations behind;

**Consequently**, we request that a specific percentage of the grants be allocated **only** to feminist organizations and women's and young women's rights organizations.

**Mr. President,**

We, the undersigned, feminist and women's and young women's rights organizations,

**Hope** that the French government, by accepting our requests, proves its understanding of the real needs of feminist and women's and young women's rights organizations and thus sets a good example for future initiatives of the same kind ;

**Finally**, we hope that our voices will be heard, that corrective measures will be taken, and that additional instructions will be given so that the "Support Fund for Feminist Organizations" and its subsequent funds truly benefits the feminist and women's and young women's organizations of the Global South targeted.

**Drafted by XOESE- The Francophone Women's Fund**

**With support from:**

- **The Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID)**

## **ABOUT THE INITIATORS**

**XOESE, The Francophone Women's Fund** is a feminist foundation of public utility created on September 1st, 2015 and based in Lomé, Togo. Our mission is to mobilize financial, material and human resources and reinvest them to support the implementation of women's and young women's activists' and organizations' initiatives promoting women's, young women's and girls' rights, their economic empowerment and gender equality in Global South French-speaking countries. Our objectives are to:

- Provide financial support for the implementation of initiatives promoting the rights of women, young women and girls;
- Strengthen the institutional capacity of women's and young women's organizations;
- Encourage and support innovative initiatives aiming the empowerment of women's and young women's organizations.

For more information about XOESE, please visit: <https://xoese.org/en/home/>

**The Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID)** is a global, feminist, membership, movement-support organization working to achieve gender justice and women's human rights worldwide. AWID's mission is to support feminist, women's rights and gender justice movements to thrive, to be a driving force in challenging systems of oppression, and to co-create feminist realities.

**List of signatory organizations:**

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