

To commemorate the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Felm wishes to express its commitment to promote human rights globally by submitting a

Human Rights 75 Pledge

The existing relevance of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is undeniable. The universality, parity and fundamental nature of human rights have been questioned at an accelerating pace by populist and hostile voices around the world - at the same time as global, shared problems from climate change to the consequences of the corona pandemic call for further deepening of rules-based international cooperation. In addition to authoritarian and conflict-ridden societies, we have witnessed how democracy itself does not automatically guarantee the fulfillment of human rights, but requires continuous active agency, actions and cooperation to eliminate poverty and inequality, among other things. Democratic institutions such as free, independent and diverse civil society, independent judicial institutions and free media should also be actively defended - even and especially when these institutions challenge policies and politics of the duty-bearers and *status quo*. To achieve the sustainable development goals, it would be essential to recognize the importance of rules-based international order and rule of law. The latter ultimately guarantees the fulfillment of human rights and creates stability and security in a society.

Working with local communities and promoting their leadership has become a cornerstone in Felm's work. Locally led designs for humanitarian or development interventions are able to identify the needs of vulnerable and marginalized groups and are sensitive to the localized challenges to democracy and human rights. Local governance increases the possibilities of participation and inclusion as community members usually have the most efficient opportunity to participate in localized decision-making processes.

Moreover, sustainable peace cannot be transferred elsewhere to the diverse contexts of conflicts, peace needs to be built from within. The localized processes of peacebuilding are often the first steps in the creation of nation-wide peace processes. Locally led peace work is critical in creating enabling environment for peaceful transformation in communities and societies and enhancing the sustainability of peace and reconciliation efforts.

Local agency requires civic space. Open civic space allows people to think and speak freely, join collective actions, and advocate for change without fear of government reprisal or violence. Civic space in many places has shrunk due to repression by governments or other political establishments. Shrinking civic space has an effect especially on the work of human rights defenders.

Human rights defenders - such as journalists, lawyers, activists, local peacebuilders and people working to promote and protect women's, LGBTIQ+, indigenous and environmental rights - experience threats, harassment, abuse and even death threats as a result of their work. Particularly women peace activists in conflict contexts – or in countries where there is relative peace - are facing barriers to their meaningful participation.

There is ample evidence of the negative effect of wars and conflicts on mental health and psychosocial wellbeing on population level. Due to this negative correlation, conflict-affected societies need tailored support to restore social fabric and cohesion. Reasons for the relapse of conflict include weak institutions, insufficient reckoning with the past and the root causes of the conflict, lack of post-conflict justice and the failure to provide broad-based mental health and psycho-social support to affected communities. The latter affects the capacity of members of affected communities, including local peacebuilders and reconcilers, to initiate and to participate in peacebuilding.

Felm pledges to:

1. promote for civic space and resist backlashes on human rights by advocating for the right to freedom of assembly, association and speech;

2. promote the human rights of the most marginalized groups in particular, through national and international advocacy;
3. advocate for increased commitment at policy level to locally led development and humanitarian work and peacebuilding to enable the local people and communities to have the principal authority and influence over the strategy, implementation, evaluation, and resource allocation of the work;
4. seek possibilities to provide greater support and protection for human rights defenders;
5. support locally led strategies and initiatives to accelerate women's leadership in peace processes;
6. gather information on and identifying the psychosocial wellbeing needs of peacebuilders, as well as identify and create strategies and means to support peacebuilders' wellbeing.

Discrimination and prejudice significantly endanger the realization of human rights, equal treatment and opportunities especially for women and girls, persons with disabilities, minorities as well as those at risk of marginalization and living in the midst of conflicts. Multiple discrimination – where a person is discriminated based on many different grounds, such as gender, disability and belonging to a minority – causes multiple harms to the realization of individual rights. This has an impact on a society as a whole: non-discriminatory societies are safer for everyone.

The gains made over decades regarding gender justice are being driven back in several areas from reproductive rights to gender-based violence and LGBTIQ+ equality. Gender equality is 300 years away and inequalities are growing. Moreover, the persons with disabilities are still marginalised all over the world. Their risk of economic, social and health problems is very high compared to the majority. Disability inclusion should be mainstreamed and taken seriously in all levels all the way from individual households to the top of politics.

Felm pledges to

7. ensure the mainstreaming of gender justice in all its work and promote the ending of gender discrimination, for example issues pertaining to sexual and reproductive health and rights;
8. promote human rights approach to disability inclusion, including the “Nothing about us without us” principle;
9. promote the integration of the rights of persons with disabilities into government policies and practices with active involvement of persons with disabilities and their respective organizations;
10. gather disability disaggregated data to gain understanding of participation of persons with disabilities in Felm's program and actively promote the inclusion of persons with disabilities in Felm's program in all roles;
11. increase cooperation with organizations of persons with disabilities to deepen understanding about rights and conditions of persons with disabilities.

As global average temperatures continue to rise, the world's most marginalized communities remain disproportionately affected, in both developing and developed countries. Amongst the most climate-vulnerable are women, children, indigenous and local communities, people with disabilities and marginalized groups. While these communities contribute little to climate change, they face the highest burdens and are often left out of climate change policy- and decision-making. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights recognizes that climate change has serious implications on the full enjoyment of human rights, including the right to life, food, health, water and sanitation, to adequate housing, and self-determination. Achieving climate justice requires identifying and challenging the root causes of climate change. Achieving climate justice requires industrialized countries to respond to their historical responsibilities, and to mobilize and transfer resources, technologies and finance to the most vulnerable countries to enable them to adapt, mitigate and counter loss and damage. Equally, climate justice will not be achieved without tackling structural issues related to our deeply unbalanced and unsustainable global economic system.

Felm pledges to

12. advocate for climate justice in the international climate negotiations together with its partners, promoting the rights and agency of the most marginalized people such as persons with disabilities;
13. strengthen the capacity of local partners to advocate for climate justice by supporting their possibilities to engage in national and global climate discourse;
14. advocate for a growing amount of funds to be directed to climate adaptation and resilience and facilitate Felm's partners' access to these funds by supporting them in the application processes;
15. advocate for the loss and damage fund agreed in COP27 to be put in place and facilitate local organizations' access to loss and damage funding;
16. advocate for locally led responses to climate adaptation and resilience.

There is an interconnection between climate change and children's rights: climate change has a direct impact on children's rights to life, health, education, and a safe environment. Children are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change, such as extreme weather events, air pollution, and food and water scarcity. Strengthening children's rights is crucial to protect their well-being.

Climate change is fundamentally an intergenerational issue, as its consequences will be felt most profoundly by future generations, including today's children. By ensuring that children's rights are protected, and their voices are heard in climate policy decisions, we also promote intergenerational equity and justice.

Felm pledges to

17. increase funding for projects that strengthen children's rights in the face of climate change by engaging also the wider ecumenical climate movement calling out for climate justice.

One of the core principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child is the respect for the children's views. The opinions of children and youth must be considered when making decisions about things that involve children or affect their lives. Child's and youth's meaningful, safe, and appropriate participation is highly important for ensuring sustained child well-being and creating inclusive and just societies with informed and engaged citizens. Participation empowers children and improves their self-esteem, fosters their ownership, and gives them concrete opportunities to affect matters that influence their lives.

Felm pledges to

18. seek different and multiple ways to strengthen child inclusion and participation in its program, for example by exploring the possibility of establishing *Children's Committee* through which children and youth from Felm's countries of operations and child-centered projects can better participate and influence in the work carried out in the countries of operations. *Children's Committee* can, for example, be consulted on programmatic issues and make recommendations for the leadership;
19. promote the strengthening of capacities of families and communities to act for child's rights and protection.

Felm is an internationally active organization established in 1859 and one of the largest Finnish civil society organizations working in global development. Felm's work aims to promote human dignity and justice around the world. Felm currently works in 24 countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America with nearly 100 local and international partner organizations. The majority of Felm's actions take place in the least developed countries. Felm's programme applies the human rights-based approach, including the principles of inclusion, participation, non-discrimination, equality, transparency, and accountability. Felm promotes human rights together with its partners.