

Subject: Disrespectful behaviour towards woman of colour at the EDDs and need for effective prevention and redress mechanisms

Dear Ms Urpilainen,

(CC: Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission; Helena Dalli, European Commissioner for Equality; Reinhard Bütikofer, Member of the European Parliament; Ilze Juhansone, Secretary General, European Commission; Klaus Welle, Secretary General, European Parliament; Roberta Metsola, President of the European Parliament; Vula Tsetsi, Secretary General, Greens/EFA; Ska Keller, Co-President, Greens/EFA; Phillipe Lamberts, Co-President, Greens/EFA; Ricarda Lang, Co-leader, Die Grünen; and Omid Nouripour, Co-leader, Die Grünen.)

The undersigned organisations and individuals bring to your attention our concerns regarding the unacceptable behaviour of a member of the European Parliament at an Agora event at the European Development Days (EDDs) hosted by two civil society organisations, Eurodad and Counter Balance.¹ While this letter is based on this one instance of misconduct, it reflects a systemic pattern of behaviour that is not isolated to one individual or EU institution. We hope that in calling your attention to this issue, immediate action and more structured measures will be put in place to prevent such behaviour from repeating itself.

The reaction of Mr. Bütikofer MEP to the concluding remarks of the host, Ms Jean Saldanha, the Director of Eurodad was very disrespectful. This unacceptable behaviour is aggravated by the fact that Ms Saldanha is a woman of colour.

As organisations that prioritise and work hard to ensure the respect, protection and strengthening of women's rights, with a holistic and intersectional approach, we stand by the European Commission's - and Ms Von der Leyen's commitment to achieve a 'Union of equality'.

We note that the Gender Equality Strategy 2020-25 states that "[i]nclusive and diverse leadership is needed to solve the complex challenges that decision-makers face today. More inclusion and more diversity is essential to bring forward new ideas and innovative approaches that better serve a dynamic and flourishing EU society. Allowing citizens from all backgrounds to meaningfully participate in society is a necessary precondition for a well-functioning democracy and leads to more effective policy-making."

European legal frameworks including Article 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights, Article 21 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, the Communication on the A Union of equality: EU anti-racism action plan 2020-2025 and the Racial Equality Directive (2000/43/EC), address equality between men and women and persons, with the latter specifically addressing women as victims of multiple discrimination.

We consider that Mr. Bütikofer, in his behaviour, demonstrated a blatant lack of respect for these core values and legal frameworks promoting inclusion and equality. In addition, his comments demonstrated a disregard for civil society's role as a critical guardian of transparency and accountability. We are particularly compelled to act and stand in solidarity with Ms Jean Saldanha, who, as one of the few women of colour in a leadership role in Brussels, was treated so disrespectfully. At the same time that this incident took place at the EDDs, Ms Vula Tsetsi, Secretary General of the Greens/EFA group in the European Parliament hosted the group's civil society day and explicitly called out European politicians excluding or dismissing expertise from the global south, persons of colour and women.

¹ The EU's Global Gateway: market creation or international development? took place on Tuesday 21 June at the European Development Days. Further information about the event is [available here](#) and a video of the incident is [available here](#).

There are many more instances of similarly disrespectful behaviour towards women in various spaces involving EU institutions and bodies in Brussels. In particular when women demonstrate their agency, express a difference of opinion or are simply outspoken.

We believe that systematic efforts on the part of EU institutions and bodies to prevent such behaviour and redress it when it occurs is long overdue.

We call for immediate and visible action to be taken, to bring the unacceptability of his actions to the attention of Mr. Bütikofer and to take measures to prevent their recurrence and for Ms. Saldanha to be informed of the actions taken. This must include training to understand the challenges and issues of intersectionality, equality of women's participation and leadership and issues of unconscious bias.

Moreover, given the systematic nature of the problem, we believe that EU institutions and bodies must develop a structural plan for mandatory unconscious bias training of all EU institutions and bodies' office holders and civil servants on these issues.

Additionally, we call for clear codes of conduct for all EU events to be instituted for prevention, reporting and redress of harassment, discrimination or disrespect of women, as well as other forms of discrimination, addressing the full intersectionality of the issue. There are numerous best practices of policies and codes of conduct which we would be happy to share. Experts from civil society, including women of colour, must be engaged in the drafting of such codes of conducts. Such a code of conduct should be clearly published and explicitly shared with all organisers and speakers.

We hope that this incident will trigger the start of a deep and structural transformation in which representatives of all EU institutions and bodies respect women in their full intersectionality and promote their equality in leadership and participation. We stand ready to work closely with you in this endeavour.

Yours sincerely,

EUROPEAN NETWORKS

Dominik Gross,
EURODAD

Nadia Asri,
**European Network Against
Racism (ENAR)**

Piotr Sadowski,
Social Platform

Josianne Gauthier,
CIDSE

Ruth Faber,
EU-CORD

Nicholas Aiossa,
Transparency International EU

Vicky Cann,
Corporate Europe Observatory

Laura Sullivan,
WeMove Europe

INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS AND NETWORKS FROM OTHER REGIONS
--

Javier Garcia,
ActionAid International

Lidy Nacpil,
**Asian Peoples' Movement on
Debt and Development**

Tarcila Rivera-Zea,
**Continental Network of
Indigenous Women of the
Americas-ECMIA**

Shereen Talaat,
Arab Watch Coalition

Céline Mias,
CARE International

Frank Vanaerschot,
Counter Balance

Emilia Reyes,
**Equidad de Género: Ciudadanía,
Trabajo y Familia**

Matti Kohonen,
Financial Transparency Coalition

Dereje Alemayehu,
Global Alliance for tax justice

Patricia Miranda,
Latindadd

Evelien van Roemburg,
Oxfam

Rangarirai Chikova,
Pan African Lawyers Union

Stefano Prato,
**Society for International
Development (SID)**

Francis Kairu,
Tax Justice Network Africa

NATIONAL NETWORKS AND ORGANISATIONS

Brian Tomlinson,
AidWatch Canada

Titi Soentoro,
**Aksi! for gender, social and
ecological justice**

Sanaa Awadallah,
Al Ataa' Charitable Society

Dominik Gross,
Alliance Sud

Debbie Stothard,
ALTSEAN-Burma

Nuno Barroso,
APIT Portugal

Ziad Abdel Samad,
**Arab NGO Network for
Development**

Karolina Rugle,
Are You Syrious

Roger Sahi,
**Association Jeunes Agriculteurs
(AJA) - Côte d'Ivoire**

Luiz Vieira,
The Bretton Woods Project

Elena Triffonova and Genoveva
Tisheva,
**Bulgarian Gender Research
Foundation**

Sylvie Bukhari-de Pontual,
CCFD-Terre Solidaire

Tarcila Rivera-Zea,
**Chirapaq, Centre of Indigenous
Cultures of Peru**

Leïla Oulhaj,
CNCD-11.11.11

Ashanul Karim and Aminul
Hoque,
COAST Foundation

Dobo Topo Aimé,
**Collectif des Leaders pour le
Développement durable de
l'Afrique**

Doreen James Simpungwe,
**Community for Change
Organization (COCO)**

Nick Hildyard,
Corner House

Leo Staković,
Croatian Youth Network (MMH)

Saima Zia,
Crofter Foundation

Kristijan Kovačić,
**CROSOL - Croatian Platform for
International Citizen Solidarity**

Tim Jones,
Debt Justice UK

Karolína Silná,
**Ekumenická akademie
(Ecumenical Academy)**

Maruša Babnik,
Ekvilib Institute

Sreedhar Ramamurthi,
Environics Trust

Aminul Hoque and Ashanul
Karim,
**Equity and Justice Working
Group – Bangladesh**

Susanna Veevo,
**Estonian Roundtable for
Development Cooperation AKÜ**

Kathleen Lahey,
**Feminist Legal Studies, Queen's
University Canada**

Thomas Mc Donagh,
Financial Justice Ireland

Xavier Dutoit,
Fix the Status Quo

Andrea Stocchiero,
**FOCSIV - Italian Federation of
Christian Organisations in
International Voluntary Service**

Istvan Farkas,
Friends of the Earth Hungary

Semira Mohammed Beyan,
Gate for Opportunity (GO)

Claudio Fernandes,
Gestos (soropositividade, comunicação, gênero)

Lakshmi Kumar,
Global Financial Integrity

Sandra Misiribi,
Good Health Community Programmes

Vidya Dinker,
Growthwatch India

Melvine Ouyo,
Hope for Kenya Slum Adolescents Initiative

Appolinaire Nishirimbere,
Initiative citoyenne pour l'environnement et le développement durable (ICED-Burundi)

Cheryl-Lyn Selman,
Institute for Economic Justice

Heron Belfon,
Jubilee Caribbean

Line Christensen and Emily Macpherson,
Jubilee Scotland

Muhammad Reza Sahib,
KRuHA - People's Coalition for The Rights to Water

Janice G Foerde,
Women and Development (KULU) - Denmark

Justina Kaluinaite,
Lithuanian NGDO Platform

Umesh Upadhyaya,
National Labour Academy - Nepal

Oyette Zacate,
Oriang Women's Movement Inc.

Mehran Ali Shah and Ramzan Mallah,
Pakistan Fisherfolk Forum

Ian Rivera,
Philippine Movement for Climate Justice

Mathieu Paris,
Plateforme Française Dette et Développement

Antonio Tricarico and Elena Gerebizza,
ReCommon

Jane Nalunga,
SEATINI Uganda

Teresa Kotturan,
Sisters of Charity Federation

Luke Holland,
Tax Justice Network

Noel Hodson,
Tax Reconciliations – Oxford

Sihama Al-Qaisi,
Together for Better Life Foundation

John Devitt,
Transparency International Ireland

Spyros Marchetos,
UndebterWorld

Ana Maria R. Nemenzo,
WomanHealth Philippines

INDIVIDUALS

Wambura Elisha Chacha,
Tarumbeta Radio

Meera Ghani, Moxie Consultancy Collective

Tony Salvador

Linda Gichohi, Omar Jouville & Company Advocates

José Gusmão, Member of the European Parliament

Celine Tan, School of Law, University of Warwick

Claudine Letsae, Green Party of Wales and England

Marisa Matias, Member of the European Parliament

Miranda Moussa

Emma Woodford