

The statement we read out on Sunday at the “Reclaiming Our Bodies” march on the occasion of Women’s Day (Online Article)

Historical Note

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Content

The statement we read out on Sunday at the “Reclaiming Our Bodies” march on the occasion of Women’s Day: March 8 – Hands off our bodies!

Today is not just a day of celebration where we go out to have fun. This day is a day of remembrance, of demands and struggle, because we cannot forget those women who gave their lives so that we can stand before you today and demand what we are entitled to. Let us be mindful that this day carries with it grief, because even today women are raped, tortured, murdered, mutilated or killed by their partners, former partners, relatives or strangers every day. These experiences are shared by all of us in the patriarchal society we live in.

This day brings together the past, present and future of a day that honors the memory of those who have died, celebrates the dynamism of those who daily take to the streets and demand the obvious, and lays the foundations for all the people who are still not born.

Today, the 8th of March is a day on which millions of women unite their voices, with trans and non-binary people on their side, and become a cry for dignity, justice and freedom. A cry so loud and resonant that it has the potential to transform the planet into a place where there is room for everybody, a place where we can live together in diverse and radical equality. The struggle of women and all those who identify with it, has always been and will remain a political struggle. On the occasion of International Women's Day, we have the opportunity to highlight the inequalities and suffering experienced by women, to address the invisibility and vulnerability experienced by trans and non-binary people, and finally to discuss how patriarchy and heteronormativity oppresses us to the extent that it often suppresses our fighting spirit. Today is an important day because, above all, it reminds us that those who are not privileged, cis straight white men face daily obstacles and discrimination on the basis of what they are - or rather, what they are not.

That is why we have come together today because we believe that we can use the dynamics of this day as a lever of pressure, mobilisation and empowerment. This day represents a potentiality and a belief that our struggles can ensure us a society that can become more inclusive, more just and more secure.

Women's Day is an opportunity to listen to groups of people who have been silenced over time. Today

we use our voices together to highlight these injustices, but also to empower each other.

We don't claim that our experiences, discrimination and oppression are the same - but we know that they affect our lives and our bodies in a similar manner. And we experience every day how it feels not to be able to make decisions about your body, whether you are a queer woman, a trans person, a queer person or a non-binary person.

What are we asking? Hands off our bodies!

1. An end to all forms of gender-based violence.

The history of intersectionality, i.e. the various forms of intersecting inequalities, has shown us that the multiple identities carried by each person become a cause for the reinforcement of our oppressions, and often arm our oppressors' hands. The increase in the numbers of femicides in recent years, or the violent incident at the TEPAC a few days ago against the expression of the LGBTQ+ community is the irrefutable legitimization of the need to subjugate those gendered subjectivities that do not conform to the norms of the cis straight male heteronormativity. All such outbreaks of gender violence must stop NOW - whether this violence is physical, verbal or emotional.

2. Bodily autonomy for all

The bodily autonomy of us all has to do with how much we feel that our body belongs to us, that our body is self-determined. The bodily autonomy, and this includes all bodies, has to do fundamentally with our dignity. We wish, therefore, to celebrate all bodies. Bodies with disabilities, bodies born in the wrong body, bodies that are not white, bodies that do not conform to capitalist and heteronormative standards or stereotypes of beauty. Self-determination means that I decide about my body, freely without social pressures - with whatever expression of sexuality and gender identity I feel.

3. Reproductive rights for all

Reproductive rights means deciding whether to reproduce or not - and having the health care system cover any decision we make. It also means that doctors and priests should not have the right to intervene in that decision. We demand free and safe abortion covered by the GESY for every woman and every person with a uterus. We also call for medically assisted reproduction and childbearing to be accessible to all people regardless of gender and sexuality. At the same time, we demand that this decision be ours and not that of experts or priests, as in the recent case where a disabled person was forced to undergo sterilisation against their will and without even being asked. Also the GESY should cover all methods of contraception for all genders.

4. Sex education, for all people

The law on sex education in schools has recently been passed. The crucial point of what will be included in the SexEd is, who will teach it, and who will decide its content. Surely the church should not be included in that decision, and certainly within the decision making processes, feminist and lgbtqi+ groups, and any group that deals with gender issues, should have a voice.

Depending on the level of education, this course should include topics such as:

α) Body: Awareness of intersex people, personal exploration, and perception, respect, pleasure, consent, touching, masturbation

b) Health and Sexual Life Management: Extensive information on body and mental health care practices, and on STIs (Sexually Transmitted Infections) protection practices.

c) Gender (Social): information on gender expression, sexuality, sexual orientation and the history of the LGBTQ+ community.

d) Prevention and Protection: correct and varied information about contraception.

It goes without saying that all negative stereotypes and prejudices in these matters must be broken down. In order to achieve this, all government departments and organisations involved must cooperate and be properly trained (Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, schools, health institutions, etc.).

5. Access to health services

We request that the General Health System include Sexual Health Clinics in all Provinces where they will be offered: free information on sexual education, free annual screenings (mammograms, Pap smears, Prostate, STIs), free preventive medical and non-medical treatments (contraceptives, condoms, PrEP, morning-after pill), free services for dealing with underage pregnancy and vulnerable adult groups (abortion through surgery and medication - abortion pill), guidance on support and financing services for single parents/underage parents, etc., free services to HIV-positive people (treatments, medication, etc.), free services to transgender and non-binary people (minors and adults) such as hormone treatments, medication, gender confirmation surgery and breast removal or breast augmentation. At the same time, the provision of psychological and mental support by professionals and specially trained professionals is very important in the comprehensive provision of services. _Today we are here because we want to celebrate our bodies, because we want to celebrate all our identities and fight against the discrimination that affects us, either individually or collectively.

Today we celebrate our bodies because we are tired to expect the obvious.

We do not accept the "possibility of change" at a vague "later stage" - change is needed now before we mourn other people because somebody did not keep their hands off our bodies.

We do not accept that our struggle, like the struggle of other oppressed groups, be patronised and diminished for the sake of liberal, non-radical political agendas.

Nor do we accept that our struggle be depoliticised by 'comrades' who belittle the urgency of what we are demanding today or who see it as a mere symptom of the workers' struggle.

Dreams that seem utopian to us are possible in a very simple way after all: not to be afraid, to react to everything which is outside the world we dream of.

We are not waiting for the change - we are demanding it right now.

[Kores Xapolytes](#) & Queer Collective CY & [Sispirosi Atakton](#)

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Nicosia

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