

The Global Campaign for Equality in Family Law (GCEFL) calls for family law reform on International Day of Families

Statement for International Day of Families - 'Week of Action'

On this International Day of Families (IDoF), the Global Campaign for Equality in Family Law (GCEFL) calls on women's rights movements, the human rights system, and governments to demonstrate their support for the reform of discriminatory family laws and prioritize ending discrimination in family law and practices. From May 15-19 2023, we invite activists, civil society organizations, and policymakers to participate in a 'Week of Action' that highlights the need for equality in family laws in order to achieve a just and equitable future for women and girls around the world.

This "Week of Action" is in line with the 1993 UN General Assembly Resolution [A/RES/47/237](#) which vowed to "promote awareness of issues relating to families and to increase the knowledge of the specific social, economic and demographic processes affecting families."

The GCEFL was launched in March 2020 with the overarching goal of pursuing equality¹ for women and girls and other marginalised groups under law, policy, and practice in matters relating to the family in all its diverse forms², regardless of religion and culture. It is led by a Coordinating Committee of eight leading women's rights, human rights and faith-based organisations – [Equality Now](#) – where the Secretariat of GCEFL is currently based, [Act Church of Sweden](#), [Latin American and Caribbean Committee for the Defense of Women's Rights \(CLADEM\)](#), [Musawah](#), [Muslims for Progressive Values](#), Solidarity for African Women's Rights (SOAWR) represented by [the African Women's Development and Communication Network \(FEMNET\)](#), [Women's Learning Partnership](#), and [UN Women](#).

Discriminatory family laws do not allow women and girls to fully exercise their human rights and achieve their full potential. In countries around the world this legislation prevents women from controlling their right to marry or divorce, inheriting property on an equal basis with men, or having equal guardianship and custody rights of their children. A majority of countries also do not grant women the same financial rights as men. According to the recently released World Bank report, ['Women, Business and the Law 2023'](#), women remain unable to obtain a divorce in the same way as men in 46 economies, 41 countries still prevent daughters from inheriting the same proportion of assets as sons, and 76 countries continue to limit women's equal rights to property.

Family laws, particularly in South and Southeast Asia, the Middle East and Northern Africa and the African region, are often associated with closely held beliefs about culture, religion, and tradition. This has made family law among the most intractable areas of legal reform. In the Latin American region, civil laws and court practices pertaining to marriage and family condone concepts like 'false parental alienation syndrome,' which is evidenced to negatively impact child custody cases, particularly for women and children.

¹ Equality referred here is 'substantive equality' as guided by the [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women \(CEDAW\)](#), with additional guidance from General recommendation No. 25. In summary, it is not necessarily enough to guarantee identical treatment between women and men so that every woman and girl has the opportunity to enjoy their rights.

² The Global Campaign for Equality in Family Law supports gender equality for all and families in all their diverse forms. Additional guidance for definition of families taken from the [UN Women 'Families in a Changing World' - Progress of the World's Women Report, 2019 - 2020](#) which shows 'significant diversity in family structures and relationships—across regions, within countries and over time'.

A concerted and strategic global effort is needed to draw attention to and call for the reform of discriminatory family laws as a fundamental women's and human rights issue.

During this 'Week of Action', we invite organisations and individuals keen on seeing family law reform to participate in our online campaign and to share responses to the following prompts using the hashtag #FreeOurFamilyLaws:

- **In what ways are family laws in your country/region unequal towards women and girls and what is the impact of this discrimination?**
- **What is your call for change?**
- **What do you want to 'Free our family laws from?' or What does 'Equality in the Family' mean to you?**

This week, GCEFL is also launching its new website and call for membership. Membership is open to community, national, regional, or global organisations and groups (registered or otherwise) who agree and align with the objectives of the GCEFL. We welcome membership applications via our new website at www.equalfamilylaws.org.

This IDoF, we stand shoulder to shoulder with advocates and activists around the world pushing for reform of discriminatory family laws. Join us, and together we can #FreeOurFamilyLaws!

More About the Global Campaign for Equality in Family Law

The GCEFL works on the grounding belief that attaining equality in the family is a necessity, not a choice. It serves as the cornerstone upon which an equal society is built. The GCEFL believes that while the right to culture and religion are human rights, they cannot supersede a person's fundamental right to equality, which begins within the family.

In 2023, the GCEFL is embarking on a collaborative, three-pillared approach to:

- **Advocate:** make equality in family law, policy, and practice a global priority by 2030
- **Unify:** strengthen solidarity and collaborative action within and across regional networks and campaigns, and
- **Amplify:** support and amplify national level efforts to reform family law.