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UNsynced: United Nations Out of Sync with Grassroots Global Feminists

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BLOG

By Anna Kerr, founder and Principal Solicitor of [Feminist Legal Clinic Inc.](#) in Sydney, Australia. This article was adapted from the speech Anna gave at #FiLiA2021 during the UNsynced Panel.

The first draft of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights opened: '*All men are brothers.*' Australia's only woman delegate to the United Nations, Jessie Street, worked with other women to have Article 1 amended to instead read: '*All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.*' Despite these efforts to remove the sexist language, the [Declaration](#) still refers to the '*conscience of mankind, 'the spirit of brotherhood'*' and uses male pronouns.

The problem no doubt arose because, aside from Eleanor Roosevelt, [the members of the committee](#) tasked with framing the Declaration were all male. This is reminiscent of the internet meme of a table of dogs meeting to discuss Feline Healthcare.



Lady Jessie Street as the only female delegate from Australia at the San Francisco conference for the establishment of the United Nations in 1945



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Partial view of the first meeting of the 8-member Drafting Committee on International Bill of Rights, Commission on Human Rights, appointed by Mrs. Eleanor D. Roosevelt, Commission Chairman.

UN Photo | 09 June 1947 | United Nations, Lake Success, New York

@Cute_and_Food

" Meanwhile, at today's meeting on feline healthcare...
" - courtesy of GallowBoob via [#aww](#) in Reddit [#CuteAnimals](#) ...

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The efforts by [Jessie Street](#) and her colleagues to establish a [right for women to be free from violence were also unsuccessful](#), while her argument for recognition of the rights of motherhood resulted in a paternalistic compromise with the drafting of [Article 25](#) which groups mothers with children as needing 'special care and assistance'. This outcome may have satisfied the religious lobby but was a far cry from recognising the right of mothers and children not to be separated. Instead Article 16 enshrined the 'family' as the fundamental unit of society requiring protection.

These deficiencies passed uncorrected in 1948 and continue to impede the advancement of women's human rights. The UN *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* ([CEDAW](#)) in 1981 also failed to incorporate a right for women to be free from male violence and provides inadequate recognition of maternal rights generally. It provides only that women should have equal rights with men in relation to the number and spacing of children and the rights and guardianship in respect to those children. There is inadequate acknowledgement of the greater physical, economic and psychological investment and impact that childbearing involves for women and therefore their additional need for protection.



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Despite recent claims to the contrary, only women give birth. Upon being born the baby searches only for its mother. While imposing sexist stereotypes on men and women should be resisted, to prioritise the best interests of children it is necessary to acknowledge certain physical realities. The failure to recognise sex-based differences has left the way open for cruel child removal policies and [significant trauma and suffering for many women and children](#). The best interests of a child require that this unique physiological attachment should be preserved and not undermined merely to satisfy the [demands of a father](#), third parties or the state. Forced separation of a mother and baby or young child must be considered cruel and unusual punishment and contractual obligations under surrogacy arrangements should certainly not be allowed to trump human rights.

These international human rights provisions ignore the protective role of mothers and the additional risk that men pose as perpetrators of the overwhelming majority of domestic and [sexual violence](#) occurring within families. Thanks to [campaigning efforts by men's rights groups, mothers who allege child sex abuse by fathers are rarely believed](#) and risk being accused of [parental alienation](#) and having their child placed into the perpetrator's care. This is despite evidence of an epidemic in child sexual abuse in which a [child's biological father is the most likely offender](#). Recognition of socially constructed gender identities also works to displace [women's sex-based rights](#) and dismantle the few protections that exist for mothers and children escaping male violence. Increasingly, men who feed on pornography and groom the vulnerable are being hailed as stunning and brave when they push at the boundaries and demand access to women's safe spaces and services.

[The United States is the second biggest funder of the UN's Human Rights](#) work despite not having ratified CEDAW or the Convention on the Rights of the Child or most of the other agreements passed by the UN. Organisations like Microsoft and Open Society Foundation also provide significant funding. Meanwhile, few women's NGOs can fund delegates to travel to Geneva and report to CEDAW, and it is delegates funded by trans lobby groups such as ILGA that exercise influence over the Committee's deliberations with their repeated demands for legal recognition of sex upon self-declaration and the decriminalisation of prostitution. With [women controlling only an estimated 1% of global wealth](#), it is likely that male interests will continue to dictate the human rights agenda, including specifically in relation to women and children, despite men's overwhelming track record as the perpetrators of violent and sexual crime. When will women speak up and insist that the fox is not left to guard the hen house?



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[the International Women's Human Rights Campaign.](#)



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