CSO Statement on Inequalities at the 3rd session of the Commission on Social Development
Presented by Tessa Khan, Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development

Thank you Madam Chair, distinguished delegates, and many thanks to UN ESCAP and UN Women for facilitating the participation of civil society in this session. I’m speaking today on behalf of the regional Civil Society Steering Committee for the Beijing+20 process.

We welcome the Committee’s focus on inequalities, including the Secretariat paper which recognizes the importance of redistributive policies, social protection, and the promotion of decent work. We also welcome the adoption of the Palma index, which importantly reflects the true extremes of economic inequality.

This focus on inequality is rightly echoed in the Sustainable Development Goals, and we applaud the inclusion in the SDGs of a standalone goal on social and economic inequality. However, we regret the limitation of the focus to income inequality when, as highlighted in this morning’s discussion, inequality in wealth and capital, including control over and access to land, is at the root of the most pervasive and entrenched forms of inequality, and is ultimately most exclusionary of women, girls, and other marginalized and vulnerable groups. At the heart of this is a failure to universally realize human rights and substantive equality, which has deepened and perpetuated social exclusion and neglect.

As for the questions which the Committee is specifically deliberating upon today, we ask that governments ensure that a gender perspective is firmly integrated into its deliberation regarding these and other questions. Further, we suggest that governments' commitment to adopting redistributive policies is cemented in the finalization of goals and targets in the post-2015 development agenda, and that the focus on decent work accords equal importance to the right to a living wage and the valuation and redistribution of unpaid care work, both of which are critical to addressing income inequality.

In addressing inequalities between countries, we ask that governments commit to addressing the international systemic issues—namely the international trade, finance and taxation architecture—that continue to undermine the sustainable development of countries in this region.

Finally, we note that the better elements of the Sustainable Development Goals have been significantly weakened by the lack of accountability that has been determined for the post-2015 development agenda. We therefore ask that governments ensure that, for the commitments made here and in the coming months, there is a strong and effective accountability mechanism that is enforced at the national, regional, and international levels.