

Women's pay gap 'biggest robbery in history'

A new UN initiative launched calls the women's pay gap, which sees women paid 23 percent less than men globally: "The biggest robbery in history."

During the 61st session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) meeting, UN Women and the International Labor Organization (ILO) launched the high-profile Equal Pay Platform of Champions to raise awareness on the persistent gender wage gap, Ipsnews reported.

The coalition consists of celebrities and activists including award-winning documentary filmmaker Kamala Lopez, Olympic gold medalist Abby Wambach, President of the Garment and Allied Workers Union Anannya Bhattacharjee, and actress Patricia Arquette.

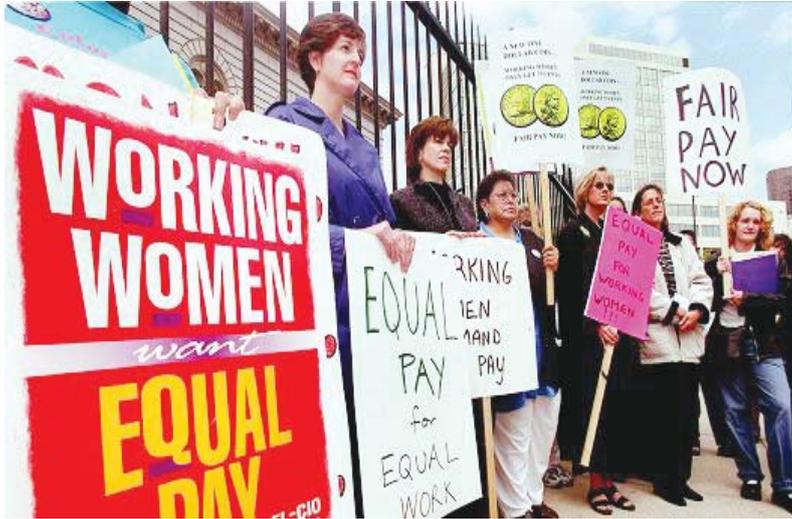
"There has been a normalization for centuries of a bias against women, an acceptance that we are less than...there is no woman that [the wage gap] does not affect," Lopez said as she moderated the launch.

UN Women's Executive Director Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka echoed similar sentiments, stating that such bias has led women's work in a range of sectors to be undervalued.

"What does a woman in Wall Street have in common with a woman who has a shop in Brazil? Or in a cane farm in South Africa? Or in a sweatshop in Bangladesh? Chances are that they are all not paid equally by their different employers," said Mlambo-Ngcuka to delegates in the filled General Assembly Hall.

Globally, the gender pay gap is at approximately 23 percent as women make 77 cents for every dollar earned by men.

The figure is even higher in some regions and among certain communities. In the US, African American women earn only 60



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cents, Native American women 59 cents and Hispanic women 55 cents for every \$1 that white men earn. In Turkey, women earn up to 75 percent less than their male counterparts.

Retired US soccer player Abby Wambach shared her story and reasons for joining the Platform of Champions, stating: "I have two gold medals, I won a World Cup with my country... but I actually have to worry about paying my bills now."

Before the enactment of Title IX, which guarantees that no person in the US can be discriminated on the basis of sex in education receiving federal funds, opportunities for women in sports were extremely

limited as women received only two percent of academic athletic budgets. It has since increased to 40 percent due to the law, but its existence is now threatened by the new administration.

"I want to make sure that the world that I leave is better than the world that I found," Wambach said in reference to raising her stepdaughter.

Garment and Allied Workers Union's President Anannya Bhattacharjee shed light on the plight of garment workers around the world, including those in Asia who are responsible for the production of over 60 percent of the world's garments. Bangladesh alone, which is the world's second largest

textile industry, earns more than \$25 billion a year from exports and employs over four million workers, the majority of whom are women.

"The workers of this industry who are mainly women cannot access their basic human rights...industries that are dominated by women tend to be lower paid, which means that millions of women and generations of families live in poverty," said Bhattacharjee.

In December, protests erupted in the South Asian nation as garment workers took to the streets to demand a monthly minimum wage increase from \$67 to \$187. The call was dismissed, more than 1,500 workers were fired,

and over 40 arrested.

Bhattacharjee highlighted the need for a living wage, and to recognize the additional unpaid labor that women often take up to care for their families.

International Labor Organization (ILO) estimates that it will take 70 years to close the gender wage gap at the current rate while the World Economic Forum warned that it could take 170 years for women and men to be paid the same for equal work due to reversed progress over the last few years.

Governments also joined in the call to action, including the government of Iceland who recently became the first country to require equal pay for all.

Women, children slaughtered in South Sudan

Women and children are being slaughtered in South Sudan by soldiers who are said to be using knives for the massacres to save their ammunition.

The brutal conflict, sparking UN warnings over ethnic cleansing, is driving a devastating famine that is threatening millions with starvation in the country, reported The Independent.

One woman, who fled violence in the city of Yei, told how she saw her best friend and her children, including three-month-old baby, butchered.

"The children and the elderly, they slaughtered them," Sylvia, 31, told Save the Children aid workers.

"When the armed groups get you with your children, they will kill all of you.

"They will take you from your homes and slit your throat. For the small children they stab them, then they die later.

"I've seen children tied to their dead mother and thrown in the river — soldiers have been doing this a lot."

Sylvia fled after seeing her best friend murdered, taking in a baby girl she found abandoned at the roadside on her journey to neighboring Uganda.

"When we began our journey, I saw with my own eyes two boys and one woman...they had been slaughtered," she added, saying soldiers were using knives to save bullets.

"Children weren't going to school, there was hunger everywhere. Children would die of illness."

A famine was declared in parts of South Sudan last month in the first such catastrophe the world has seen in six years.

More than 5.5 million people — almost half the population — will not have a reliable source of food by July in what the UN says is a worsening man-made crisis, driven by the conflict and worsened by government inaction.

The world's youngest nation has been mired in civil war since 2013, when President Salva Kiir fired his deputy Riek Machar, sparking a war that has increasingly split the country along ethnic lines.



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Fighting, massacres, looting and village burning has killed tens of thousands, caused widespread hunger and forced three million people from their homes — pitting Kiir's Dinka ethnic group against Machar's Nuer.

A report presented to the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva concluded that both government forces and non-state groups were targeting civilian populations on the basis of their ethnic identity with killings, abductions, gang rape and sexual violence on an "epic" scale.

A UN survey found 70 percent of women living in "protection of civilian camps" in the South Sudanese capital of Juba had been raped, the vast majority by police or soldiers, while a staggering 80 percent had been forced to watch someone else being assaulted.

Thousands of refugees are pouring over the border every day into Uganda, where more than 500,000 people have arrived since last July, with almost 90 percent women and children.

It has become Africa's largest refugee country, seeing more than 1.5 million people flee their homes since the conflict erupted in South Sudan in December 2013.

Mumbai's air quality worse than New Delhi

When World Health Organization's report announcing New Delhi in India as the most polluted city in the world did the rounds, the residents weren't really in for a shock.

It did create some sparks, but not in disbelief. It is evident that the pollution levels in the city are only getting worse and the toxic air is the cause of the alarmingly rising number of respiratory diseases among children and adults alike. Winters prove to be the worst time of the year, with pollution levels for particulate matter (PM2.5 and PM10) crossing way beyond the permissible limit.

Now as winters are coming to an end, in a new study done by the System of Air Quality Weather Forecasting and Research (SAFAR), they found that there's another city which has beaten New Delhi in terms of pollution level for February and March, and that's Mumbai, ndtv.com wrote.

Air pollution is one of the biggest concerns across the globe, and more so in India, where it repeatedly seems to be crossing the limit considered safe for health. Microscopic pollutants in the air may not be visible to the naked eye, but they are causing severe health hazards as we live and breathe the toxic air. It's almost like living in a toxic gas chamber.

In the study conducted by SAFAR, the air quality levels of three cities — New Delhi, Pune and Mumbai — were compared from February to March 13, and Mumbai was found to have 20 percent 'very poor' air quality days, while New Delhi and Pune had none. On certain days Delhi and Pune had 40 percent and 47 percent 'satisfactory' air quality days respectively, but Mumbai only had 13 percent.

"Between February and March, Mumbai had more 'poor' and 'very poor' days and less 'satisfactory' air days, Delhi and Pune did not have any 'very poor' days with cleaner air than Mumbai," read the conclusion of the study.

Isolation of US poor explain changes in concentrated poverty



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Concentrated poverty — neighborhoods where 40 percent of the population or more lives below the federal poverty level — is back on the rise for all races in the US, according to Penn State demographers.

Growing residential separation and isolation of the poor in American metropolitan areas, as well as overall increases in poverty since the early 2000s, explain most of the change in concentrated poverty, they added, Science Daily wrote.

In the 1980s, concentrated poverty rose, but eased in the 1990s. However, the latest figures suggest that a rise in concentrated poverty has returned, according to John Iceland, professor of sociology and demography and research associate in the Population Research Institute.

"I personally was curious about this volatility — what explains it? Why did we see this increase in the 1980s and the decline in the 1990s and why has it been rebounding?" said Iceland. "As

a social demographer, I'm particularly interested in the changing composition of people living in certain neighborhoods and what types of broad population processes help explain the general trend."

Although the country has seen shifts in poverty concentration before, there is a recent change in the locations of poverty concentrations. "The composition of people living in high-poverty neighborhoods and their locations has changed," said Iceland.

"It used to be thought of as black, inner-city poverty, but now more Hispanics and a higher proportion of whites are living in high-poverty neighborhoods. They are less likely to be just in the inner core of cities, but oftentimes in inner suburbs."

Overall poverty is different from poverty concentration, although they could be related, said Iceland, who worked with Erik Hernandez, a graduate student in sociology and demography.

"We do look at how the changes of overall poverty affect the concentration of poverty, because those are two

distinct concepts," Iceland said.

"There could be a certain percentage of the population in a country that is poor, but what the concentration of poverty looks at is to what extent are they concentrated in relatively few neighborhoods."

In this study, poverty concentrations followed trends in overall poverty, according to the researchers, who report their findings in a recent issue of Social Science Research.

The country's recent poor economic performance, such as the deep recession of 2006-2008, has affected individual poverty, neighborhood poverty and the percentage of all people and all poor people living in high poverty neighborhoods, the researchers said.

In the 2000s, about 20.5 percent of poor blacks were living in a high-poverty neighborhood. Between 2010 and 2014, that figure was up to 23.1 percent.

The percentage of poor non-Hispanic whites living in high-poverty neighborhoods in the 2000s was approximately

5.8 percent, which went up to 8.2 percent between 2010 and 2014. The total of poor Americans living in high-poverty neighborhoods went from 11.4 percent in the 2000s to 14.1 percent in the latest numbers.

According to the researchers, an increase in the concentration of poverty could affect government services, such as health, police and education. The trend could also have an impact on job opportunities.

"A lot of resources are tied to neighborhoods — the quality of schooling and the amount of a school's economic resources vary across neighborhoods, for example," said Iceland.

"People have talked about how there's more crime and social disorganization in places with high poverty levels. And this all has consequences for quality of life."

The researchers used data from the US Census Bureau that cover 1980 to 2000 and information from the 2000-2014 American Community Survey.