Introduction to

The Coalition of Feminists for Social Change
We are COFEM...

*The Coalition of Feminists for Social Change* (COFEM) is a collective of activists, academics, and practitioners working globally to end violence against women and girls (VAWG, also referred to as GBV).

Made up of 78 members representing every part of the world, COFEM members work in both humanitarian and development contexts.
Hosted by *Raising Voices* and *NoVo Foundation*, a group of academics, activists, and practitioners held a 2-day convening in New York in 2016 to analyze the declining feminist perspective in humanitarian and development *VAWG* efforts. It was decided that we should formalize a network in order to begin to address shared concerns.

**COFEM** was created in 2016 to reassert a feminist perspective in *VAWG* work.
Why is COFEM needed?

Thanks to critical work by women’s movements, significant progress has been made over the last three decades to address VAWG.

yet...

Over the last decade space is shrinking for feminist-informed VAWG work. We are in danger of losing hard won gains.
What Is A Feminist Perspective To VAWG?

VAWG is about the effects of the gender hierarchy, not just the gender binary.

All violence may be said to be 'gendered', but not all violence is based on gender-based discrimination.

Patriarchy drives VAWG, this must be addressed.

Photo credit: Solome Nakweesi-Kimbugwe
COFEM Works To Infuse A Feminist Perspective

- Strengthen and spread a feminist analysis of **how to better include men and boys** in VAWG efforts so they remain accountable to women and girls.

- **Reclaim space** for women-centred, women-led and rights-driven work on VAWG in humanitarian & development settings

- Promote **gendered language and programming** linking gender inequality and VAWG (GBV)

- Work with other specialists to ensure initiatives addressing the needs of other GBV groups don’t create **victimhood competition**
The Rise of Gender-Neutrality

Gender-neutral language that interprets ‘gender’ as way to talk about roles and identity of all people rather than the gender hierarchy between males and females contributes to the de-politicization of the problem of VAWG, particularly when using the its sister term, GBV.

Rather than remedy the power imbalances between men and women, gender-neutral arguments for addressing equally the needs of males and females in gender and GBV programming can risk reinforcing it by eclipsing women and girls’ differentiated experiences.

A feminist perspective focuses on gender inequality not gender inclusivity.
Arguments insisting that GBV programming which doesn’t address the needs of men and boys and/or LGBTI groups broadly is “discriminatory” not only misses the point of why “GBV” work is targeted to women and girls, it also sets up a competition in victimhood that is counter-productive.

GBV actors are ready to work with other specialists as they develop an evidence base and programming to meet the needs of males and LGBTI groups broadly, but not at the expense of emptying GBV theory and practice of its feminist-informed, woman-centered essence.
An emphasis on technocratic approaches to VAWG—that is, approaches that focus on technical issues in programming without attention to VAWG as a social problem—often lack a political analysis essential for long-term social change and VAWG prevention. They also don’t always center women and girls in designing and leading responses.

Funding paradigms, an apolitical perspective and increasing global fundamentalisms are undermining feminist movement-building.
Without a feminist analysis ‘male engagement’ to address VAWG risks reinforcing and reproducing patriarchy.

Leadership from women is essential to ensure that men and male-led initiatives remain accountable to women’s movements.
The Year Ahead

- Launch five brief ‘thought pieces’ on the state of feminist VAW efforts
- Develop and disseminate a Feminist Pocketbook
- Create an online COFEM Learning Platform and “Knowledge Summit”
- Build collaborations and opportunities to highlight a feminist perspective to VAWG/GBV in humanitarian and development settings
How You Can Get Involved

**Activists:**
Reach out to COFEM members to learn more about feminist perspectives and programming on VAWG/GBV.

**Programmers:**
Keep women and girls centered in VAWG/GBV efforts.

**Funders and policy makers:**
Recognize the importance of supporting female-centered VAWG/GBV.

**Male allies working on VAWG:**
Speak out against the marginalization of women & girls in policy & programs.

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**Join COFEM!**
Talk to an existing COFEM member about how to get involved.
Thank you