

Declaration of the Rights of Woman & of the Female Citizen

15 Sept 1791

1. Woman is born free and lives equal to man in her rights. Social distinctions can be based only on the common benefit.

2. The purpose of any political association is the preservation of the natural and imprescriptible rights of woman and man. These rights are liberty, property, safety, and resistance to oppression.

3. The principle of all sovereignty rests essentially with the nation, which is nothing but the union of woman and man. No body and no individual may exercise any authority which does not come explicitly from the nation.

4. Liberty and justice consist of restoring all that belongs to others; thus, the only limits on the exercise of the natural rights of woman is perpetual male tyranny. These limits are to be reformed by the laws of nature and reason.

5. Laws of nature and reason forbid all acts harmful to society; everything which is not forbidden by these wise and divine laws cannot be prohibited, and no one can be forced to do what these laws do not command.

6. The law must be the expression of the general will. All female and male citizens must contribute either personally or through their representatives to its formation. It must be the same for all, both male and female. All citizens being equal in the eyes of the law, must be equally admitted to all honours, positions, and public employment according to their ability and without any other distinctions besides those of their virtues and talents.

7. No woman is an exception; she is accused, arrested, and detained in cases determined by law. Women, like men, obey this rigorous law.

8. The law shall establish punishments only as are strictly and obviously necessary, and no one shall suffer punishment except by a law passed and decreed before the commission of the offense and legally applicable to women.

9. Once any woman is declared guilty, complete rigor is to be exercised by the law.

10. No one is to be disturbed on account of his opinions; woman has the right to mount the scaffold; she must equally have the right to mount the rostrum, provided that her demonstrations do not disturb the legally established public order.

11. The free communication of ideas and opinions is one of the most precious rights of woman, since that liberty assures the recognition of children by their fathers. Any female citizen thus may say freely, I am the mother of a child which belongs to you, without being forced by a barbarous prejudice to hide the truth; an exception may be made to respond to the abuse of this liberty in cases determined by the law.

12. The guarantee of the rights of woman and the female citizen implies a major benefit; this guarantee must be instituted for the advantage of all, and not for the particular benefit of those to whom it is entrusted.

13. For the support of the public force and the costs of administration, the contributions of woman and man are equal. She shares all the duties and all the painful tasks; therefore, she must have the same share in the distribution of positions, employment, offices, honours, and jobs.

14. Female and male citizens have the right to verify, either by themselves or through their representatives, the necessity of the public contribution. This can only apply to women if they are granted an equal share, not only of wealth, but also of public administration, and in the determination of the proportion, the mode of assessment and of collection and the duration of said tax.

15. All women and men collectively, for tax purposes, have the right to demand of every public agent an account of his administration.

16. No society has a constitution without the guarantee of rights and the separation of powers. The constitution is null and void if the majority of individuals comprising the nation have not cooperated in drafting it.

17. Property belongs to both sexes whether united or separate; for each it is an inviolable and sacred right. No one can be deprived of it, since it is the true patrimony of nature, unless the legally determined public need obviously dictates it, and then only with a just and prior compensation.