

Statement from Katja Iversen

Recently, former Women Deliver employees have come forward on social media to say they experienced a toxic work environment and Black former employees explicitly described how they felt tokenized, abused, and discriminated against during their time at Women Deliver. And in my discussions with staff, it's clear that the problems still run deep.

I was and am shaken, heartbroken, and tremendously angry with myself. I am in charge of this organization, and I apologize and take full responsibility for these experiences and for my role in it. We have not lived up to our own values, and I am deeply sorry for the pain and the trauma experienced by current and former employees. I am grateful to our former staff for their bravery in coming forward, as well as our current staff and Young Leaders who've stood in solidarity.

Women Deliver's Board of Directors is actively engaged in the process of appointing a third party to independently investigate, a move that I support and feel is essential for accountability. I will cooperate fully with that process, and I have offered the board to take a leave of absence until the conclusion of the investigation, an offer they have accepted.

Women Deliver has been working hard and smart to change the world for – and with – girls and women, pushing for gender equality and sexual and reproductive health and rights for all, no matter their gender, geography, race, age, ability, who they love, or their socio-economic circumstances. Together with partners across the globe the great staff have achieved amazing results over the years. But it is not enough, and it is not acceptable if we pushed for equality globally while a system of inequality festered internally. That is why Women Deliver will be working relentlessly to make overdue changes, including structural, interpersonal, and programmatic shifts, and why I personally will be listening more, learning more, and being more self-reflective and question my default reactions; to examine how and where my privilege and unconscious biases are at play.

This is a watershed moment, where the whole world is reckoning with the systems of white supremacy that have led to systemic racism. I hope that collectively we can learn from this long overdue awakening and see real change, including putting more power in the hands of grassroots women's organizations, young advocates, and girls and women across the globe.

I am deeply sorry for the pain I have caused, and hope that the results of the investigation will help better the organization. I look forward to a stronger Women Deliver, and gender equality movement, that I know will come from this work.

-Katja Iversen