

Commission on the Status of Women

Sixty-fifth session

15-26 March 2021

Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”

Statement submitted by African Action on Aids, Afrikanische Frauenorganisation, Dominicans for Justice and Peace, European Union of Women, Federation of American Women's Clubs Overseas, Graduate Women International, International Association of Democratic Lawyers, International Council of Jewish Women, International Council of Psychologists, International Council of Women, International Federation of Business and Professional Women, International Federation for Home Economics, International Inner Wheel, Le Projet Imagine, Pax Romana, Servas International, Socialist International Women, Soroptimist International, Women's Federation for World Peace International, Women's International Zionist Organization, World Union for Progressive Judaism, and Zonta International, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

Statement

At the United Nations high-level meeting marking the 25th anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, Secretary-General António Guterres called on Member States to accelerate progress toward achieving the goals of the Beijing Platform for Action: “It starts with the equal representation of women in leadership positions, in governments, boardrooms, in climate negotiations and at the peace table – everywhere decisions are taken that affect people’s lives.”

Gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls are inextricably linked to achieving sustainable development for all. We acknowledge the recognition by global leaders that the commitments made 25 years ago in Beijing have not been matched by action, investments and accountability. We welcome the commitment of governments to significantly accelerate concrete actions towards achieving Sustainable Development Goal #5, Gender Equality.

The Beijing Platform for Action agreed to in 1995 by 189 United Nations Member States at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing remains the essential comprehensive global agenda for the achievement of gender equality and women’s rights. However, despite some progress, no country has achieved gender equality. The redistribution of power and resources between women and men in public and private spheres has not been realized. Women work more hours, earn less, have fewer choices, and face violence at home and in public spaces. Gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls remains a human rights issue and social and economic imperative.

The Beijing Declaration stated unequivocally that: “Women's empowerment and their full participation on the basis of equality in all spheres of society, including participation in the decision-making process and access to power, are fundamental for the achievement of equality, development and peace.” We are far from achieving full participation: men hold 75% of parliamentary seats and 73% of managerial positions, and represent 70% of climate negotiators and almost all peace negotiators. Violence against and harassment of female politicians, journalists and human rights defenders are daily realities in public and private life, as well as online.

Women's leadership works to transform asymmetrical power relations and the economic, social and political systems that reproduce inequalities, and to make institutions more gender responsive. Women leaders emphasize ethical and responsible solidarity. Women's equal participation, perspectives, political will and leadership are required to bring about the transformative change needed to address the root causes, structural barriers, discriminatory practices and social norms that underpin discrimination and inequality.

2020 – the 75th anniversary of the United Nations, Beijing+25, twenty years since the adoption of Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, ten years since the founding of UN Women, and five years into Agenda 2030 – was intended to be a springboard for renewed action. Instead, the global coronavirus pandemic acted as a magnifying glass, exposing and intensifying structural inequalities in health care, the global economy, security and social protection. The consequences of the pandemic threaten to undo decades of progress. At the same time, responses to the pandemic have demonstrated the effectiveness of women's leadership. At the national level, countries with female leaders have had especially effective responses.

The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed the indispensable roles women play in all spheres of life, at all levels. Women account for nearly 70 per cent of health care workers on the frontlines in the fight against the coronavirus. Women's unpaid care work has increased significantly. Due to the pandemic, estimates indicate that 47 million additional women and girls could be pushed into extreme poverty in 2021, bringing the total to 435 million. A generation of girls could have their futures - and their potential contributions to public life - endangered by school closures and interruptions to their education. The ongoing climate crisis continues to have adverse impacts on women and girls.

During COVID restrictions, women and girls in lockdown with their abusers experienced a global shadow pandemic of a dramatic increase in gender-based violence. The World Health Organization estimates that even before the pandemic, 1 in 3 women worldwide have experienced intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence in their lifetime. Violence against women, a global public health problem and a violation of women's human rights, is embedded in patriarchy, misogyny, and men's attempts to control and dominate women's lives and bodies.

The global health and economic crisis presents an opportunity to rebuild with women and girls at the center, to finally achieve the promises made in Beijing. Now is the time to accelerate efforts to achieve more effective participation of women in decision-making, so we can regain the ground we have lost. Structural and systemic imbalances in power relationships call for deep systemic transformation. We must not return to "normal" but rather create better, safer, more equal societies and a more resilient planet. By empowering women and girls who represent half of the world's population and half of its potential, we can achieve these goals. While women bear the burdens of conflict, war, discrimination and domestic violence, they are more than

victims, they are agents of progress. Empowered women and girls are the best drivers of growth and hope for reconciliation.

A significant number of Member States have already committed to binding obligations to achieve gender equality and combat discrimination and violence against women. We call for accelerated and strengthened implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, Security Council Resolution 1325, the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention), and all other relevant legal instruments and treaties, as well as Agenda 2030, especially Sustainable Development Goal #5.

The member organizations of the NGO Committee on the Status of Women Vienna, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, call upon all Member States to:

Ensure women and girls in all their diversity are able to enjoy and exercise their full human rights, including the right to participate in making decisions that affect their lives, free from violence and discrimination;

Enact policies and commit funds to enable women's full participation in public life, including: elimination of all discriminatory laws, structural barriers, social norms and gender stereotypes; strengthening institutions to promote gender equality; providing child care and parental leave to enable the redistribution of care work in households; recognizing the value of women's unpaid care work in gross domestic product or income account indicators;

Implement social protection measures, wage subsidies and care services to counter the gender-specific impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, and support women in the informal economy and women entrepreneurs;

Eliminate all forms of gender-related violence including but not limited to femicide and rape as a weapon in conflicts, and mitigate the adverse impacts of conflicts on women and girls;

Address harmful social and cultural norms that normalize violence against women and girls, and exercise zero tolerance for gender-based violence;

Increase funding for support services for victims of gender-based violence and strengthen services for survivors;

Provide access to quality education and training for women and girls, as education is fundamental to women's full and effective participation and decision-making in public life;

Close the gender digital divide to ensure that women and girls can participate equally with men and boys in distance learning and contribute to and benefit from technology and innovation;

Provide equal access to digital tools and teacher training to ensure that distance learning does not broaden existing inequalities;

Enhance collaboration with civil society to create safe spaces for women and girls to exercise their voice and leadership and ensure enjoyment of their human rights;

Support, protect and fund women's organizations and women's human rights defenders who provide services and exercise community leadership at the grassroots level;

Involve women's groups and leaders meaningfully in all peace negotiations and peace-building efforts to increase the likelihood that conflicts will be resolved and communities restored;

Reduce military expenditures and increase investments in health care, education and social protections, particularly for women and girls;

Mobilize women and men, girls and boys, to work together in intergenerational partnerships for human rights, equality, justice, peace and a sustainable environment;

Recognize and ensure the value of including women's perspectives in decision-making, to achieve more just and equal societies.

Each of us is ultimately only as empowered as the most vulnerable among us. The world is crying out for equity, empowerment, inclusion and justice for all. We must all work together to ensure that the voices of all women and girls are included, heard and respected in all fora at all levels.