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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": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: financing for gender equality and the empowerment of women

Statement submitted by Association for Women's Rights in Development; Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd; Flora Tristán Peruvian Women's Center; International Alliance of Women; International Council for Adult Educations; International Presentation Association of the Sisters of the Presentation; International Trade Union Confederation; International Women's Anthropology Conference; International Women's Tribune Centre; Network Women in Development Europe; Public Services International; UNANIMA International; Women's Environment and Development Organization, 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.

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Statement

Introduction

In the Monterrey Consensus adopted at the International Conference on Financing for Development in 2002, UN Member States made a number of commitments to mobilize and allocate resources for achieving sustainable development, poverty eradication, gender equality and the empowerment of women. They committed to mainstreaming "the gender perspective into development policies at all levels and in all sectors"[para 64], and to reinforcing national efforts aimed at formulating "social and gender budget policies" [para 19]. Current preparations for the follow-up review Conference scheduled to take place in Doha in 2008 provide an opportunity to assess progress in meeting these commitments.

Much of the development literature suggests that initiatives on gender equality and women's empowerment have not been effectively mainstreamed into development processes, while women's machineries and programmes, and the women's movement, have been grossly underfunded. These proposals highlight a set of key policy issues that need to be addressed within the financing for development review process in order to reverse this disastrous trend, and provide adequate funding and policy support for the social sectors and for gender equality and women's empowerment.

Mobilizing domestic resources

Taxation

1. In keeping with pro-poor strategies to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), governments should give priority to strengthening tax administrations and tax collection systems, focusing on progressive direct taxation on wealth and capital assets rather than VAT on essential consumer items needed by low-income earners, a majority of which are women. It should be further recognized that women make significant contributions to care giving from earned income. The Committee of Experts on International Cooperation on Tax Matters should study this gender-differentiated dimension of household spending with a view to making recommendations for suitable tax breaks for women, in order to take this into account.

Budgets

2. In national policies, priority should be given to effective resource allocations for achieving the MDGs and other internationally agreed development goals, including:

- full and productive employment and decent work;
- ensuring access to basic utilities and social services for all;
- ensuring that women have equal access to employment opportunities and labour market services, and to social services.

3. Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) should be adopted as a key tool in national development strategies, with a view to ensuring that adequate resources,

whether from external aid or domestic revenue, are channelled towards fulfilling international gender equality and human rights commitments as set out in the Beijing Platform for Action, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, and ILO Conventions 100 and 111 on non-discrimination in employment. GRB as a mechanism for promoting gender equality and women's empowerment in national policies and programmes requires specific budgetary allocations, increased funding and a strengthened mandate for national women's machineries to build capacity, implement GRB initiatives, and to monitor and evaluate gender equality outcomes. Funding and support are required for adequate gender analysis for effective policy decisions on the financing of gender programmes.

Accounting for unremunerated work

4. Governments must use methods to measure women's unpaid work and its contribution to the national economy through developing and implementing time-use surveys to make visible the number of hours women spend working versus the actual income or payment they receive for their work. These methodologies should be assumed by the National Statistics Offices at the country level as an instrument to measure poverty, and the results should be included in the National Accounts Systems (ECLAC Quito Consensus 2007).

5. These contributions should be costed as investments to the national economy and used as a basis for providing matching funds for income generating activities, for social services and direct support to the care economy, thereby effectively transferring women's work from the non-cash to the cash economy.

Mobilizing international resources

6. The expansion and integration of global markets have not been matched with sufficient protection for the workers and communities that are the victims of human and trade union rights violations. We consider that a strengthened global regulatory framework incorporating human rights, labour and environmental standards is necessary in order to strengthen the protection of human and workers' rights, promote gender equality objectives, and safeguard the environment. Such a framework would draw on the relevant UN and ILO normative instruments, and provide a common approach to addressing both transnational business operations and foreign direct investment. We welcome governments' public affirmation of the need for such standards.

Remittances

7. Recognizing the significant contributions made by migrant remittance flows to financing development, measures should be adopted to reduce transfer costs and avoid double taxation of migrants in host and sending countries. Development policies should be underpinned by a rights-based approach which protects the rights of migrant workers, a large proportion of whom are women.

Trade

8. Governments must undertake gender-impact assessments and reviews of bilateral, regional and international trade agreements, in order to identify and redress gender biases in earning levels, job security, conditions of work, unpaid work burdens and access to productive and natural resources. These assessments and reviews should also be applied to sector reforms promoted and financed by multilateral institutions.

Official development assistance

9. Government commitments to reach and maintain the UN target of 0.7% of GNI in ODA should be adhered to, and a significant share of ODA should be targeted for women's empowerment and gender equality. Institutional frameworks at national levels and among international aid agencies should be engendered and strengthened with a view to improving aid effectiveness, accountability and benchmarking for the achievement of gender equality outcomes. Aid policies and programmes should adhere to the principles of national country ownership and participation of civil society, including women's organizations in policy formulation, implementation and monitoring of results.

10. Within the framework established by the Paris Declaration, there exists a notable lack of gender analysis and participation of civil society organizations. Particularly absent are those organizations addressing the issues of gender equality and the feminization of poverty. Donor budget support and sector programmes are frequently dependent on macroeconomic conditionalities that aggravate gender inequities. Moreover, the harmonizing of donor practices for programme-based support will most likely result in less space for innovative approaches and therefore the dilution of gender policies at the ground level.

11. It is essential to promote an aid architecture that is sensitive to the realities of those historically bypassed as recipients and without participation in the process. Real "country ownership" must be the result of consistent participation on the part of civil society organizations, particularly women and marginalized groups, who are most affected by poverty.

External debt

12. Given that current debt-restructuring approaches have not liberated resources for development and that in heavily indebted poor countries poverty is an epidemic affecting the majority of people, most acutely women and children, 100% debt cancellation is necessary and overdue. Further, governments should initiate a new and genuine policy space on debt to enable countries to overcome debt distress. Current policy space is conditioned by current debt relief mechanisms which do not recognize past failures of heavily indebted poor countries. Genuine policy space should be built around analysis that provides additional resources to help countries meet the Millennium Development Goals and Beijing Platform for Action (see report of the Secretary-General on the follow-up to and outcome of the International Conference on Financing for Development (A/62/217, paras. 97-102)).

Systemic issues

UN gender equality architecture

13. Governments must support a stronger gender equality architecture at the UN to enable governments and the UN system to better achieve their commitments to gender equality, women's empowerment and human rights. The proposed new women's entity needs a strong, combined mandate on normative and operational functions to ensure effective delivery, including through the expansion of its programmes on the ground to improve women's lives. Donors should commit to mobilizing the resources required to fund the new entity at a minimum level of $500 million.