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Commission on the Status of Women
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Item 3 (a) of the provisional agenda*
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

Statement submitted by Pathways to Peace, Women's Intercultural Network and Women's World Summit Foundation, 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.

* E/CN.6/2011/1.

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Statement

Convening of a Fifth World Conference on Women

1. We urge the fifty-fifth session of the Commission on the Status of Women (2011) to support a United Nations Fifth World Conference on Women and to advance this proposal to the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly. The Target date would be 2015, 20 years after the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. The reasons for holding a Fifth World Conference on Women are set out below.

2. A Fifth World Conference on Women would generate awareness of the new super-agency, UN Women, raise consciousness, provide media coverage and raise funds.

3. The potential of a Fifth World Conference on Women as a consciousness-raising focus is enormous. It would be the first such conference in the twenty-first century, the first since widespread use of the Internet and technologies that could bring the conference to every city in the world. As a United Nations-sponsored conference of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society, the focus would be on learning best practices, networking support and implementing the Beijing Platform for Action, Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security, and the Millennium Development Goals.

4. A Fifth World Conference on Women would be the first to make widespread use of the Internet and associated technologies to bring women's issues and solutions to worldwide attention. The Internet provides the means to bring issues and solutions to global awareness: what delegates are hearing, seeing and learning can be transmitted via live streaming, webcasts and smart phones, and by 2015 there will be still other technologies. Panels, presentations and interviews can reach audiences in places throughout the world. Individuals attending the conference will be able to communicate directly with their home communities. Events and presentations about what has been accomplished by and for women would educate and inspire. The conference would raise awareness that the planet and humanity need to have women involved at every level for there to be peace and sustainability in the world. The Fifth World Conference on Women would be to activists what the Olympic Games are to athletes.

5. Development of the next generation of women global and local leaders, who will know one another, will grow out of a Fifth World Conference on Women. At the fifty-fourth session of the Commission on the Status of Women (Beijing+15), it became evident how influential the Fourth World Conference on Women had been in developing leadership and networks among the women who were at Beijing, most of whom are now in their 60s and 70s. They have had a major influence on shaping programmes at every level. A Fifth World Conference on Women would bring current and future women leaders together, creating and mobilizing effective intergenerational leadership. Women's friendships and causes are the glue of lifetime alliances, providing emotional support for leaders of NGOs.

6. Women want a world fit for children; a Fifth World Conference on Women would be a big step in that direction. It would provide a platform for voicing the concerns that mothers universally have about their children's future and help create the political will necessary to create a world where children, and therefore everyone,

would not fear physical or psychological violence; where there would be enough good food to eat, clean air and water, health care, education, and freedom to think, speak, create and love. A Fifth World Conference on Women would energize the global women's movement towards this end.

7. Neuroscience since Beijing has shown that women respond to stress differently than men. Women reduce stress by sharing perceptions, feelings and strategies. This is called the "tend and befriend" oxytocin response, and is enhanced by estrogen (UCLA research, S.E. Taylor et al., 1990). This hormonal response supports dialogue, collaboration and peaceful resolution of conflicts and supports the designation of women as the "empathic gender" (Simon Baron-Cohen research summation, 2003). This contrasts to men's "fight or flight" physiological adrenaline and testosterone response to stress, which increases aggression and competitiveness. For peace and sustainability, political decisions and budgets need to be more oxytocin-influenced and less testosterone-driven; for Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) to be effective, gender equality and women's empowerment are requirements.

8. All of the Millennium Development Goals require the empowerment and equality of women in order to be implemented. To achieve gender equality and empower women, the political will to make these goals national and international priorities has to exist. Mobilization of women on their own behalf has been the most effective, and often the only, reason for the gains made so far. All eight Millennium Development Goals touch essential aspects of women's well-being and in turn, women's empowerment is critical for achieving the goals (documentation of the United Nations Development Fund for Women).

9. A Fifth World Conference on Women and events leading to and following it would further lead women's empowerment and equality towards critical mass and a tipping point that would bring gender balance to the world. The historical precedent is the women's movement in the United States in the late 1960s and 1970s, which had its beginnings in small consciousness-raising groups and the dissemination of information through articles and conferences. Within a decade, there were major changes in the cultural attitude towards women and how women saw themselves. Now women are once again coming together in circles of support and action. When an idea, attitude or belief such as equality, which was once resisted, reaches a critical mass, women and gender balance will become accepted as ordinary.

10. Women want a Fifth World Conference on Women. A grass-roots petition has over 10,000 signatures (see www.gopetition.com/petitions/support-a-un-5th-world-conference-on-women.html). Once the decision to hold this conference is made, the news will spread from woman to woman in geometric progression: if three women each tell three others, and so on, in 19 steps (3^{19}), the news would reach more than a billion women (1,162,261,467) via conversations, e-mails, cell phones, smart phones, blogs, websites and social networks.