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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 the International Federation of Business and Professional Women and the International Council of Women, 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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\* E/CN.6/2011/1.



**Statement\***

1. The member organizations of Project Five-O, **the International Federation of Business and Professional Women (IFBPW) — known worldwide as BPW International** — and **the International Council of Women (ICW)**, hold consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations and commend the recent decision of the sixty-fourth session of the General Assembly to merge the four gender entities of the United Nations into UN-Women — the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. We applaud Member States for having taken this major step forward for the world's women and girls. This unanimous decision by the General Assembly will significantly boost United Nations efforts to promote gender equality, expand opportunity, and tackle discrimination around the globe to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century.

2. IFBPW and the ICW have advocated for the creation of a strong United Nations organization that will champion promotion and advancement of the rights of women and girls worldwide. The United Nations has faced serious challenges in its efforts to support countries to implement commitments to gender equality, in part because of inadequate funding and because there has been no single recognized driver to lead the United Nations response for gender equality support. We wholeheartedly welcome the appointment of former Chilean President Michelle Bachelet as the first head of UN-Women and as Under-Secretary-General and look forward to working with UN-Women to support intergovernmental bodies like the Commission on the Status of Women and ensure that all United Nations agencies and organizations live up to their commitments to gender equality.

3. IFBPW and the ICW reaffirm the importance of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) — an international convention adopted in 1979 by the United Nations General Assembly and described as an international bill of rights for women especially in relation to articles 10 and 11 that call for appropriate measures to ensure equal rights with men in the field of education and in the workplace, including non-discrimination in employment, equal pay for equal work, and paid maternity leave.

*Equal access to education?*

4. The Millennium Development Goals, launched in 2000, pledged to eliminate gender disparities at all levels of education by 2015. The Global Education Digest, released by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) on the eve of the United Nations Millennium Summit (New York, 20-22 September) presents the latest available data to analyse national progress and pitfalls towards this goal.

5. The results are alarming — boys and girls in only 85 countries will have equal access to primary and secondary education by 2015, if present trends continue. Seventy-two countries are not likely to reach the goal — among which 63 are far from reaching parity at the secondary level. To complicate matters, achieving gender equality in education is not only about access, but about learning environments, curricula, attitudes, and a host of wider political, economic and social considerations. The challenge is not merely a question of access to learning, but much more broadly, of challenging gender ideologies in both education and society.

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\* Issued without formal editing.

*Women as powerful drivers*

6. Women today are a powerful economic force. Economic analyses by the World Bank, United Nations, Goldman Sachs and other organizations show a significant statistical correlation between gender equality and the level of development of countries. The evidence is compelling that women can be powerful drivers of economic development.<sup>1</sup> Backing women's rights isn't just good ethics, it is sound economics. Yet women's traditional social and unpaid roles in the domestic sphere have influenced the types of work thought "appropriate" for women in the paid workforce and this often sees them denied access and participation to education, training, science and technology, including for the promotion of women's equal access to full employment and decent work.

7. It is calculated that the Asia-Pacific region is shortchanged in excess of \$40 billion a year in GDP because of the untapped potential of women. To stem the costs in lost GDP, it is a smart strategy for Governments to assist women in overcoming existing policy barriers and for societies to adopt changes in norms that prevent women from full economic participation. The leakage becomes more pronounced at higher grades, with the result that women are significantly underrepresented at senior levels in many science, engineering and technology (SET) organizations.

8. For example, in 2008 women held only 9 per cent of board directorships in SET FTSE 100 companies<sup>2</sup> and in 2007-08 only 9.3 per cent of all full-time SET professors were female.<sup>3</sup> Although there is an improving trend, by 2030 at the current rate of increase, women would still only hold 18 per cent of directorships in FTSE 100 companies and account for just over 28 per cent of full-time SET professors. These statistics demonstrate that there are still considerable barriers to be overcome to ensure that women can progress in SET careers, and that addressing recruitment issues alone will not achieve this. The effect of taking a career break has a particularly significant impact on the careers of women scientists and engineers, as flexible working opportunities are not easily accessible in SET sectors. Many do not return to the SET industry at all or do not return to these sectors at the same level at which they left. If just 10 per cent of non-working mothers returned to work after maternity leave, employers could save up to £39 million each year in recruitment costs alone.<sup>4</sup>

*Retaining knowledge and experience*

9. Not only do fewer women than men choose to enter the science, engineering and technology sectors, a disproportionate number of women leave these sectors at each stage of the career ladder, a phenomenon often called "the leaky pipeline". The Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland labour

<sup>1</sup> "Groundbreakers — using the strength of women to rebuild the world economy", Ernst & Young, 2009; <http://www.ey.com/GL/en/Issues/Driving-growth/Groundbreakers>.

<sup>2</sup> Data extrapolated by UKRC from R. Sealy, S. Vinnicombe and V. Singh (2009), "The Female FTSE Report 2008: A decade of delay", Cranfield School of Management (<http://www.som.cranfield.ac.uk/som/dinamic-content/research/documents/ft2008.pdf>, accessed 08/06/10).

<sup>3</sup> Secondary analysis by UKRC (2009) of HESA (2009), "Resources of higher education institutions", Cheltenham, HESA.

<sup>4</sup> United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland Department of Trade and Industry (now the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills).

force statistics show that in 2008 there were almost 340,000 women with SET qualifications choosing to work in other sectors and over 97,000 who were not working.<sup>5</sup> This represents a huge loss to both SET organizations and the economy as a whole. The Association of Professional Engineers, Scientists and Managers, Australia's 2007 Women in the Professions Survey, found that: women are leaving the engineering profession at a rate of 38 per cent faster than their male colleagues; for 21.1 per cent of the female engineers, scientists, and computer professionals surveyed, flexible hours of work would be a significant factor in influencing their next career move.

10. Retaining female employees and using tools that will allow the private sector to build the pipeline of female talent is critical. To this end, the Women's Empowerment Principles, forged through a multi-stakeholder consultative process led by UNIFEM (part of UN-Women) and the United Nations Global Compact (UNGC), provide a "gender lens" through which business can survey and analyse current initiatives, benchmarks and reporting practices. The principles enhance openness and inclusion throughout corporate policies and operations, sharing techniques, tools and practices that bring results. The Principles are informed by real-life business practices, helping companies tailor existing policies and practices — or establish needed new ones — to realize women's empowerment. Since their launch at the Levin Institute in New York during March 2010, over 100 CEOs have pledged their support for the principles by signing a CEO Statement of Support, demonstrating leadership on gender equality and women's empowerment and encouraging fellow business leaders to do the same.

11. While this is encouraging, much work is still required, with partnerships playing an increasingly vital role to enable the active and interactive participation of governments, international financial institutions, the private sector, investors, non-governmental organizations, academia and professional organizations working together.

*Scientists study the world as it is; engineers create the world that has never been*<sup>6</sup>

12. The positive news for gender equality in general is that in most developed economies tertiary level enrolment of women has increased steadily and women are now approaching (and exceeding in some countries) 50 per cent of the total number of tertiary students. But if we look at science, engineering and technology in particular a different picture emerges. The most recent education statistics show that women constitute approximately one quarter or less of engineering students in the majority of countries and regions around the world.<sup>7</sup> Looking at the data for the percentage of women in the professional engineering workforce one can see that maintaining even these small numbers of women in the engineering profession is an ongoing problem.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Secondary analysis by UKRC (2009), "SET qualified in SET occupations in the UK, 2008", data source: Office for National Statistics, Social and Vital Statistics, Division and Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, Central Survey Unit, Labour Force Survey January-December 2008, Colchester, Essex: UK Data Archive (distributor).

<sup>6</sup> Quote from Theodore von Kármán.

<sup>7</sup> National Science Board, "Science and Engineering Indicators 2008", online, <http://nsf.gov/statistics/seind08/>.

<sup>8</sup> National Academy of Science 2007, "Beyond bias and barriers: fulfilling the potential of women in academic science and engineering", online, [http://www.nap.edu/catalog.php?record\\_id=11741](http://www.nap.edu/catalog.php?record_id=11741), OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) (2006), "Women in scientific careers: unleashing the potential", OECD Publishing, ISBN: 92-64-02537-5.

*15th Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Women Leaders Network Meeting, Tokyo*

13. At the recent fifteenth APEC Women Leaders Network Meeting held in Tokyo,<sup>9</sup> a workshop on “Fostering Women Leaders in the Scientific and Engineering Field” was organized by the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers’ Women in Engineering Affinity Group, and a number of recommendations were developed and reported back to the meeting. These included:

- Develop, progress and strengthen strategies, policies and programmes that increase women’s participation in science, engineering and technology on national as well as a regional level.
- Work collectively in changing public perception of who can become scientists and engineers, promote opportunities in science and engineering for women, promote the nature and extent of women’s leadership, and foster the next generation of women leaders.
- Create recognition awards for government agencies, institutions and businesses and other organizations to recognize outstanding contributions which have been made towards gender equality in science, engineering and technology.
- Agree on a uniform set of indicators of women’s education, workforce participation and career advancement in science, engineering and technology and regularly publish these indicators for the benefit of policymakers.
- Develop a framework to monitor science, engineering and technology initiatives and publish regular reports on programmes that have been shown to be effective in promoting gender diversity, participation and career progress.
- Develop a framework to create and share policy options to aid government, institutional and cultural decision makers to develop ways to promote women’s education, workforce participation and career advancement in science, engineering and technology and ways to promote more women to the ranks of policy decision makers.

14. Women are 51 per cent of the world’s population. Using their talents to the fullest at all levels of scientific and technological education, training and employment is an economic necessity and an investment in a country’s future national development. We believe that continued underrepresentation and under-participation of women in SET-based education, training and employment is not only a cause for social concern on equity grounds, it is also likely to inhibit a country’s capacity to develop internationally competitive research and industries.

15. We know that educating a girl is the single best development investment that can be made, with positive payoffs on a range of critical development outcomes, from her future employability to her family’s health. It means adopting measurements and evaluations. It means gender mainstreaming in budgeting. It means Governments reaffirming their commitment to education and gender equality. And above all, it means empowering women with education, which is the most fundamental condition for making a more just and peaceful world.

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<sup>9</sup> The APEC Women Leaders Network (WLN) comprises women leaders in all sectors, including business, academia, government and civil society, from the 21 APEC economies. This year, as the APEC chair, Japan hosted the 15th APEC WLN Meeting, held from 19 to 21 September 2010, in Tokyo, Japan.