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Statement submitted by Pathways to Peace, a non-governmental organization 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

The Beijing Platform for Action, The Convention to Eliminate All Forms of Discrimination against Women, Security Council Resolution #1325, other United Nations documents and statements from leaders of the United Nations and United Nations Member States set standards that require political will at the top and active women's movements on the ground to be implemented.

With the 1995 Beijing Forum and the women's movements in the 20th century as examples of how women organize and network, and conclusions from sociological depth research, the need to have a United Nations Fifth World Conference on Women as a means to energize a global women's movement becomes evident. Goals for women and girls cannot be met without the involvement of civil society at all levels. People must become informed, concerned, compassionate, and motivated for real changes to occur. For non-governmental organization leaders — especially young women who were too young to be at Beijing, this conference would be as important to them, as the Olympic Games are to athletes. Information, stories, and photographs would be shared via social networks from the mobile phones of participants. The world would know what participants learn about the status of women, predictably this would be both appalling and the inspiring.

Historical gains made by women the world over, demonstrate a principle that recent research strongly validates: women gain rights in a world where power is held mostly by men only when those at the top are motivated by feminist movements that come from the bottom up. In India, when women took to the streets to protest police disregard of rape, it generated the political will to make and enforce laws to protect women. A study of four decades (1975-2005 of data collected in seventy countries, Mala Htun and S. Laurel Weldon, 2012) found that it was grassroots feminist movements — not liberal politics, not women's representation in government, not national wealth that makes a difference, only strong feminist movements are able to voice and organize around their top priorities as women. Otherwise, women are sidelined or subordinated to men's needs or to the priorities of institutions or political parties.

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and the President of the General Assembly in a joint statement on International Women's Day, March 8, 2012, urged the members of the General Assembly to pass a resolution to hold a global conference on women. "Given that women make up half of humanity and given the importance and relevance of women's issues for global progress, it is high time that such a world conference be convened." In their statement, they noted that this conference could tackle emerging issues since the fourth conference in Beijing in 1995, which would include implementing United Nations Security Council Resolution #1325, equal access to decent work, aid effectiveness, food security, trafficking, drugs, migration, environment, climate change and information technology, all of which impact on women.

The Secretary-General's request for a Fifth World Conference on Women has not been withdrawn, nor has it been taken up. One Member State can bring it to the table again. Current grassroots advocacy efforts are focused on India as the country that could propose and host the Fifth World Conference on Women. On India's Independence Day, in his first major address (August 14, 2014), the new prime minister spoke of the need to stop violence against women and the shame of India's

rape culture. On taking office in 2008, Secretary General Ban Ki-moon made ending violence against women his personal campaign, creating UNITE as a United Nations program that states: "This vision can only be realized through meaningful actions and ongoing political commitments of national governments, backed by adequate resources." This is Top-Down vision, which can result in progressive, compassionate documents and institutional changes, but cannot become widely implemented until there is Bottom-Up pressure.

It has to be United Nations sponsored for many attendees to get visas, and it needs to inspire individuals and organizations with the financial means to recognize and support young women leaders and honour elders, especially those from developing areas to attend. Similar to scholarships or fellowships, such "sisterships" would honour altruism, service, leadership and activism. It would confer financial and relationship support to attend. It could bring together circles of wise women-elders and young leaders. Non-governmental organizations concerned with similar problems would share solutions. Attendees would find others who share values and visions, and be able to remain in communication afterwards. The result would be development of grassroots leaders who can communicate and call on others all over the world.

Women who attend will grow into larger leadership roles: examples from Beijing and the process of mirroring each other and role modelling.

When women speak as the leaders they are now, about attending the Beijing conference as a non-governmental organization representative to the Forum in Hairou, they speak of it, as being a major event in their lives. Nobel Peace Prize winner Wangari Maathai, the Green Belt activist, stands out, but so do the girls from Minneapolis who were thirteen and fourteen when they came, all of whom had their college and work goals influenced by being there. It is life-changing to grow in awareness, compassion, and admiration for the courage and leadership of women that you can identify with, and in doing so, see yourself doing something similar. The opportunity to know and learn the story of another, whose life and circumstance, skin colour, religion, or way of life is far different and yet become friends, widens one's world view, a friend is no longer "foreign." Many women who were in Beijing know that they would not be in the positions, occupations that they now are, but for the widening of potential choices that followed. Women see themselves in each other, and are role models for each other: aspiration and imagination begin with seeing in someone else, what is possible for you. This plus the support of organizations and networking that will result from attending the Fifth World Conference on Women will grow the next generation of women leaders.

Women have gender-qualities that a world in crisis needs, the more women leaders that grow as a result of the Fifth World Conference on Women, the better off the world will be.

Women understand "mother's agenda," which is to provide for every child, what each mother wants for her own child: safety to live without fear of physical or emotional violence, good food, safe water, education, medical care. This happened in Rwanda after the genocide; women are now in the majority and the decision-makers. Women whose children were murdered, adopted children who had become orphans. Women were village leaders and women held a majority in the parliament. They put basic needs of people first in building new infrastructure: such matters as safe water, clinics, roads, police who could be trusted, schools. They made decisions

collaboratively, which is a gender advantage that women have, especially under stress.

Research found that women have a “tend and befriend,” response to stress, an oxytocin bonding hormone response as they talk over the situation and possible solutions, while men do “flight or fight,” and isolate or become aggressive, which is an adrenaline plus testosterone response. (S. Taylor et al, 2000). According to recent studies, women become more attuned to others under stressful conditions, and make better decisions. Men took more risks when they were stressed, became more focused on big wins, even when they were costly and less likely; while women tended to look for more smaller, surer successes. Women under stress found it easier than usual to see the other’s perspective, just the opposite happened for stressed men who became more egocentric.

Current research on stress and gender differences supports the need for women to be involved in making decisions. The more women are seen and see each other as competent, the more likely they will step into these roles, for which many who attend 5 World Conference on Women will be well suited.

In 2000, United Nations Security Council Resolution #1325 referred to as the “Women, Peace, and Security Resolution,” was adopted. It recognized that women should be involved in the peace process at every stage, and now we have research that supports why they should. What is needed for implementation is awareness of these gender differences by all concerned, a top-down, bottom-up growth in consciousness and women who have the competence and confidence to step into these roles.
