



## Economic and Social Council

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### Commission for Social Development

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**Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the  
twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly: priority  
theme: rethinking and strengthening social development in the  
contemporary world**

### **Statement submitted by FEMM Foundation, 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.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

The FEMM Foundation is a knowledge-based health programme for women, inspired by the right for women to be informed participants in their own healthcare to make voluntary decisions based on options, information, and understanding of their reproductive health. FEMM is invested in scientific research and programme development to advance women's reproductive health.

The Commission's work is founded on the idea that there are aspects to poverty and marginalization beyond lack of financial resources which need to be addressed. Development efforts must take a holistic approach, addressing the needs of the whole person. To rethink social development in the contemporary world means looking at some of the underlying challenges in a new way.

Health can foster or hinder essential elements of social development. Poor health interferes with education, family life, and the ability to work. International law recognizes a right to the "highest attainable standard of health". This is important not only as a right, but as an enabler of participation in the social and economic life of one's community. Ensuring that all have the healthcare necessary will help everyone to reach their potential and participate in their communities. It is also an important way of ensuring that women are able to develop and contribute to their families, jobs, and societies.

For many years, medical models were based on men's bodies, not women's. Even today, some ideas based on men's experiences persist, so that women may not even recognize symptoms as serious because they do not match what is popularly known. Both men and women need appropriate care for their bodies, and women's healthcare needs to be more than just adjusted from men's standards. FEMM is combining scientific research with innovative approaches to ensure that women understand their bodies and get the care they need.

FEMM's researchers have rethought women's health. They have found that a woman's hormonal health is intrinsically linked with her overall health. They have developed better diagnostic criteria to identify conditions that are currently treated mainly at the symptomatic level and treat them at the roots. They are even discovering links with conditions not typically considered related to reproductive health. FEMM is rethinking the health of contemporary women in ways that will help them to take charge of their health and thrive in their communities.

FEMM teaches women to understand the importance of hormonal health to their overall health. Teaching women to understand and monitor the signs of their hormonal activity empowers them to make better and more informed health decisions in all areas of their lives. It allows them to identify abnormalities at an early stage and seek appropriate health care and treatment. It allows them to make informed choices about their health, relationships, and family planning. It helps them to put those health and family planning goals into action to achieve the results they want.

FEMM is low-cost and meets the underlying needs of women. Comprehensive health care for women can now be provided through basic health delivery systems, making this approach to women's health more effective, cheaper to deliver, and providing stronger health outcomes for women. Even women who have not completed schooling can learn to monitor their signs of health. Understanding

women's bodies will also combat stigma and myths associated with normal biological processes such as menstruation.

A woman who understands how her body works can monitor her health and seek help when needed. FEMM knows that hormones are essential to reproductive and overall women's health. Ovulation is the sign of health in women because it is the proof of sufficient hormone levels in the nine essential hormones that influence women's health. FEMM teaches women to understand this information and the signs that this presents in their body. In this way, FEMM women are able to identify abnormalities as they arise, seek health treatment when necessary, and ensure that their symptoms or complaints are not dismissed.

Many women experience signs of hormonal imbalances. They range from acne, to weight gain, depression, migraines, pain, irregular bleeding, and conditions such as polycystic ovarian syndrome. Many women are told that these symptoms are not important, or just in their head. They are told that irregular cycles are "normal" for them, and that these associated pains are simply the difficulty of being a woman. These symptoms can interfere with women and girls' education, work, and daily lives. We now have the science to understand that this is not true, and the ability to diagnose and treat the underlying cause of these symptoms and conditions.

FEMM's Medical Management programme trains doctors to diagnose and treat reproductive health problems, with a holistic view of a woman's body that incorporates recent research on the complex hormonal interactions between different body systems. This interaction, and the delicacy of the hormonal activity in a woman's body, is essential to the experience of health in the entire female body. FEMM has developed innovative protocols that allow doctors to identify underlying problems with precision and treat them effectively. This medical support provides treatments that help women to live healthy lives.

FEMM provides women education about their bodies to enable them to make informed choices about their health care. Informed consent involves a choice made voluntarily with information and understanding about the various treatment options and is a bedrock principle of medical care and ethics. To make an informed choice, women must be informed during family planning counselling about how their bodies work, what is necessary for health, how various family planning methods affect their bodies, and how soon after discontinuation their fertility will return. FEMM education enables women to make truly informed choices. This also helps women to make choices in other areas of their lives, such as employment and family life.

The rights to adequate family planning and the education and development of reproductive and sexual health in accordance with the culture, religion and beliefs of every community and every woman have long been recognized. FEMM Health takes into consideration all these issues, and provides solutions that are accessible to all women. It offers reproductive and hormonal education and helps women to understand the way various family planning methods work and their potential side effects. Information-based programmes are the most inclusive because they respect individual values and choices, and equip their users to make informed choices.

Women around the world can benefit from FEMM, regardless of country, income level, educational background, ethnicity, literacy, or fertility goals. Policies and funding must reflect the needs and desires of women and what will actually work

to meet them. This may involve examining education and preventive approaches to women's health care, such as FEMM. When women are educated through FEMM, they are empowered to make their own health-focused decisions, resulting in a healthier world. Healthy women are women who can participate in and contribute to their families and communities.

Women's full participation in society requires the investment in women's health and health education. We know that informed decisions lead to healthier decisions, and that women play a key role in family and community health outcomes. The knowledge gained through FEMM can allow women to identify underlying health concerns and to achieve or avoid pregnancy. When people attain the highest level of health they can, they are able to thrive and partake in their communities. The FEMM Foundation urges this commission and member states to recognize the importance of health for social development, and promote policies, such as FEMM, which empower people in their daily lives.

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