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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: Creating full and productive employment and decent work for all as a way of overcoming inequalities to accelerate the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**

Statement submitted by Soroptimist International, 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

This statement is presented by Soroptimist International on behalf of its members committed to improving the lives of women and girls in all their diversity in 122 countries and supporting organizations.

Women were by far the most impacted by job losses incurred during the COVID-19 pandemic. Too many in society and business still ascribe to the antiquated concept that men are the family breadwinners, so women's work is more expendable. Countless women were also removed from the workforce because of the increased burdens and disruptions to their multiple roles in the family, increased care-taking responsibilities, and schools transitioning to remote learning.

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, women regularly experienced precarity in the workplace, which included gender-based violence, and multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination. The impacts of these were compounded or exacerbated by the pandemic, but they are not new. For there to be a gender-transformative recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, it is vital that the discrimination women experience in the world of work be eradicated. To address full and decent employment for women, free of gender-based discrimination and violence in the workplace, actions must be taken in education and training and by governments, businesses and societies.

Achieving Gender Equality in the Workplace

To achieve gender equality in the workplace and full, decent employment for women, policies and laws must reflect the realities of peoples' lives and require action to close the gender gap, including the gender pay gap. For years, there has been an assumption that the world of work will slowly correct for the impacts of gender inequality; however, we can no longer wait for these slow, incremental changes. Immediate action must be taken by states to influence the creation of non-discriminatory workplaces by the enacting laws and implementing policies.

Specific and targeted efforts must be made to make workforces more gender equal. All avenues should be explored to achieve workplace gender equality, including the use of quotas. Social protection and floors must also be amended to reflect the fact that many women work in the informal sector or in precarious employment situations without the same guarantees of security or financial resources as men. Women should not be placed at increased risk of poverty because of the type of work that it is more socially acceptable or accessible for them to pursue.

The Gender Pay Gap

Gender Pay Gap: the principle of equal pay for work of equal value has been established in ILO conventions and recommendations and is part of the concept of decent work. And yet, the gender pay gap is still a reality. In addition, unpaid care work needs to be defined, valued and compensated. Women's pensions are affected by not only by gender pay discrimination, but also by their time off work due to their care and domestic responsibilities. This has long-term consequences with older women who are more likely to be poorer than men because of a lifetime of economic disadvantage.

The unequal distribution of caring, family and household tasks creates a significant barrier to women participating equally in the workforce. Men have a responsibility to contribute to the redistribution of household work and caring activities, and governments have a fundamental role to play as well. Improving parental leave so that fathers and co-parents can take more time off work alongside

mothers and partners establishes a more equal distribution of caring responsibilities. It also prevents a motherhood penalty, which covers the motherhood wage gap, as well as all the discriminations that mothers suffer in the workplace, in recruitment, and in career advancement when they become mothers. Governments and workplaces must do more to provide childcare facilities and low-cost childcare which are a mounting barrier to women returning to work after bearing and caring for children.

Transition from Informal to Formal Jobs

Women are overrepresented in the informal economy for many reasons: economic, stereotypical role distribution, time spent in their childbearing and care responsibilities, lower levels of education, etc. However, informal jobs generate income and contribute to economic growth, so formalization can eliminate the negative aspects of informal jobs by offering social protection, without hindering job creation and/or resulting in job losses.

Informal jobs are those not protected by formal arrangements such as contracts, and therefore workers are not protected by rights under the law. Formalization of informal jobs is therefore essential for worker protection.

In addition, work in the informal economy is often characterized by unsafe workplaces and unhealthy working conditions, low levels of skills and productivity, low or irregular incomes, long working hours and lack of access to information, markets, finance, training and technology. All these factors create barriers to women reaching economic empowerment.

Universal Social Protection

Social Protection for all and establishing a minimum wage is a direct way of flattening the playing field and reducing inequalities. Universal Social Protection includes cash transfers for women and children, benefits, support for working women on maternity leave, disability or job loss, and pensions for older women. Social protection is thus the best way to prevent poverty and to end the intergenerational cycle of poverty. Social Protection provides guarantees of security for the unemployed or those transitioning to new jobs. Universal social protection and universal access to essential services allow women to seize opportunities to escape not only poverty and hunger but also social exclusion and discrimination. Social Protection can be provided through an expanded tax system, social insurance, tax-funded social benefits, social assistance services, and other schemes providing income security.

Eliminating Gender-based Violence and Harassment at Work

For years women in all their diversity have reported harassment and violence at work. Women in high-profile positions, public roles and politics are particularly targeted. The internet has made it easy to harass women while remaining anonymous. This abuse, violence and harassment often cause women to leave their jobs and stops women from taking up positions of leadership.

In many workplaces, gender-based violence at work is not treated seriously. In many cases, members of management or leadership themselves may be involved and women have no one to appeal to for support. In other cases, women have not been believed or the harassment has been considered an inevitable part of the job. This is not acceptable. Workplaces must scale-up policies to eliminate violence in the workplace and provide support to victims of gender-based violence, harassment, and discrimination.

International instruments exist to support the eradication of workplace gender-based violence, including ILO Convention 190 (2019). These international instruments should be used as templates for national mechanisms and must be fully implemented at the national levels to ensure women can freely enter and participate in the world of work free from violence.

Education and Training

Girls and women in all their diversity suffered severe setbacks in education and training during COVID-19. UNESCO data shows 11 million girls may not return to school after the COVID-19 pandemic, setting back years of global progress. This will reduce their future earnings, career prospects and skills development. For women who have left jobs, they may need to retrain to adapt to new technology and employment conditions.

To prepare women and girls to re-enter the workforce, they must be provided with high-quality education and training to prepare them for changing employment needs. Steps must be taken to ensure more women and girls participate in science, technology, engineering and math education. Given there is a global shortage of skilled trades workers, there should also be a renewed emphasis on vocational training as it will provide access to high paying jobs. Women must also be given the opportunity to obtain jobs in STEM fields.

Specific attention must be paid to those at risk of being left behind, including rural and Indigenous women and girls, those living through conflict, refugees and internally displaced persons and women and girls in care and state institutions. Older women and women currently out of work should be given enhanced access to educational programmes to learn new skills to increase their employability as it has become necessary to work longer.

Sustainable Futures

To recover sustainably from COVID-19 in a way that supports people and planet it is vital to bring about an economic transformation. Unprecedented weather patterns, heat waves and natural disasters are increasing, and countries must do more to reduce emissions to prevent climate change. We must shift away from a growth-based economic model, recognising that economies must work for people, rather than people working for economies. When taking steps to support women re-entering the world of work, policies and programmes should approach achieving gender equality and combatting climate change as mutually reinforcing aims. Women and girls must be able to access education and training to participate in the discussion and work on the solutions to save our planet.

Conclusions and Recommendations

To promote full and productive employment and decent work that supports the achievement of gender equality and overcomes the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination experienced by women and girls as part of recovery processes from COVID-19, Soroptimist International recommends the following actions are taken by states and relevant stakeholders:

- States must ratify the ILO Convention 190 on the elimination of violence and harassment in the world of work so that workplaces are safe and secure for all.
- Ensure equal pay for work of equal value is enforced.
- Extend social protection and workers' rights to all workers, including those in the informal sector.

- Promote job creation, access to financial services and lifelong education for women and girls.
- Increase investments in education and lifelong learning, and create specific, targeted programmes, including on digital technology and literacy, and STEM subjects and careers, focused on getting women and girls back to work, education, and vocational training.
- Ensure women are equally represented in leadership positions including the use of quotas.
- Expand paid parental leave policies and requirements, so that both parents can take leave that supports gender equality in the workplace and at home.
- Develop data sources and indicators on gender equality and sustainable development which include both quantitative and qualitative sources of data.
- Partner with and provide funding for CSOs who are implementing projects to end discrimination and violence in the world of work.

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