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Commission on the Status of Women

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**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and
to the 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 Presbyterian Church USA, 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.



Statement

The Presbyterian Church USA and its predecessor denominations have consistently worked for the rights of women in church and society. In consultation with partners around the world, the Presbyterian Church USA has recognized women's importance in shaping development policy. Women's organizations began forming in the Presbyterian Church in the early 1800s. They led the way in advocacy on a variety of issues, including the elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls.

While the Presbyterian Church USA recognizes that there are endless forms of violence against women and girls, we identify the structural violence that plagues our societies in the forms of absence of services, inferior education and economic discrimination as a significant form of violence that particularly affects women and girls. The Presbyterian Church USA and its international mission partners, including members of the World Communion of Reformed Churches, recognize the important roles that women play in sustainable development and ending hunger and poverty. Presbyterians, including women's groups, have worked, and continue to work, for the eradication of this structural violence of poverty and hunger through financial and personal support of feeding programmes and initiatives that address the root causes of poverty and hunger in their own communities and around the world.

The 217th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church USA affirmed that:

As Christians, we understand that what happens to people in the process of being "integrated" is a key criterion by which globalization must be measured. We seek a kind of globalization that reflects justice, community, and the sustainability of creation. Thus we approve measures to strengthen our own discipleship in an international context and support measures by the community of nations and our own Government that will improve international governance; manage technology for the common good; support fair exchange in trade policy; make development assistance more effective; protect workers and vulnerable groups; and encourage congregational, governing body and mission responses.

The Presbyterian Church USA recognizes the vital role of Governments and civil society in working together to change systems that have systematically challenged women's equality around the world. Changing a long-standing, unjust economic system is not possible without cooperation between Governments and civil society organizations, including the religious community. The role of religious institutions in shaping social norms is unmistakable.

In 1980, the Presbyterian Church in the United States, a predecessor of the Presbyterian Church USA, recognized that the general thrust of the call for major changes in the international order was justified. The international order was chiefly the work of the industrially advanced nations and was, as might be expected, biased in their favour. From its current experience in the United States with preferential treatment as a means of equalizing opportunity for those who had been disadvantaged, it could appreciate the logic of an argument that said that developing nations needed preferential treatment if they were to compete successfully in the world economy. Significant restructuring was necessary if anything approaching a fair opportunity for development was to be realized.

It also recognized that, while it believed that a restructuring of the international economic order was a necessary condition for greater economic justice both between and within nations, it was not a sufficient condition to ensure justice

within the countries of the Third World. Indeed, changes at the international level could actually increase economic injustice within some countries, in the absence of change in their domestic policies. For that reason, the movement towards a new international economic order should be accompanied by the encouragement of basic needs strategies within Third World countries. It did not believe that the creation of new international economic arrangements by industrialized nations should be contingent upon the adoption of such measures by Third World Governments, but the two objectives should be pursued together. It urged the Government of the United States to use all appropriate influence to encourage the desired changes in the policies of developing countries.

We recognize that the language from 1980 may be different to the language that we use today and that changes in the values and policies of the United States and developed countries are needed as well. Excessive individualism and a destructive anti-Government ideology have resulted in deep insecurity, extreme economic inequality and poverty, which affect all people but increase the burden on women and girls.

The Presbyterian Church USA calls upon Governments, international institutions and civil society to take steps to address this structural economic violence that plagues our societies, particularly as it affects women and girls.

Recommendations

We call upon the Governments of the Group of Eight to initiate, in all official international trade and development organizations, a process by which greater participation in decision-making will be extended to less-developed countries through adjustments in proportional representation in voting and other measures.

We call for international regulation designed to protect indigenous peoples from cultural and resource exploitation by transnational interests and to protect shared international resources from misappropriation by private interests.

We urge policymakers to pursue policies that meet human needs and support the public good, rather than those that benefit the most powerful.

We call upon Governments and policymakers to reform economic systems that tolerate the marginalization or exploitation of their members, especially women and girls, through unemployment and underemployment, insufficient wages or extreme inequality in access to social goods.

We urge Governments to uphold the value of participation, so that those most affected by decisions can be present and involved at the table where decisions are made.

We call for institutional policies and legislation that will expand civil protection for women and girls to include equal pay for work of comparable worth and that will establish high-quality education for all as a basic human right.

Finally, we call upon the Commission on the Status of Women to reach conclusions at its current session. We are aware that national priorities compete with international agreement and that each Member State believes that its own priorities are the most important. The Presbyterian Church USA reminds Member States of the importance of international cooperation, especially at the United Nations, and calls upon them to work for compromise and agreed conclusions during the current session.