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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 Sri Swami Madhavananda World Peace Council, 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

“Living every day the principles of sister- and brotherhood”

Matri devo bhava (Taittiriya Upanishad)

The most ancient Holy Scriptures in the world, the Vedas, and their core part, the Upanishads, reveal the highest philosophical and spiritual principles of Hinduism. These texts admonish humanity to “revere the Mother like God” (*Matri devo bhava*). In these holy Vedic texts, the entire universe is a symbol of the Mother, our Cosmic Mother. And worldwide, the planet Earth is also called “Mother”.

Matri devo bhava deeply influences Indian tradition. Four times a year (during the “Navrati days”), people are called upon to give the highest respect, adoration and worship to the divine Shakti, a goddess celebrated as the Divine Mother. When referring to divinity, the name of the female personality comes first, before that of the male, as in Lakshmi-Narayan, Sita-Ram and Radhe-Shyam. The goddess of wisdom, Sarasvati, is female. Many great rivers, mountains and lakes have female names. In India today, the highest award for outstanding pupils in school is the Garge award, in honour of a highly educated philosopher, saintly woman and daughter of a *rishi*, or sage.

Likewise in Vedic tradition, the mother has the highest position in the family. Any action contemplated by the father or any family member must first be approved by the female elder if she is available. Whether married or unmarried, with children or without children, every elderly woman is called “mother”. The young girls of the village who are not yet betrothed are protected by the boys as their sisters, and every young girl and boy is called “my daughter” or “my son” by village elders. In Vedic culture, women, not men, initiate the marriage partnership: the person to whom the girl gives a flower garland is accepted by society as her fiancé.

Unfortunately in modern civilization, the negative effects of media and technology have greatly undermined high regard for the dignity of women. In recent years, greed and ignorance have rapidly increased in the world, with accompanying disrespect towards women. Everywhere women are required to take a stand against being used as marketable objects, against having their bodies used for commercial purposes in advertisements, films and other media.

A very ancient festival, called the festival of sisters and brothers, or Raksha Bandhan, helps to protect and preserve society’s moral foundations. On this day, each brother takes or renews a vow to protect his sister(s) under any and all circumstances. Raksha Bandhan, observed on the day of the full moon in August, is a day of honour, dignity and respect for women. It is a joyful festival of brotherhood and sisterhood, and of unity, ethics and spirituality, that strengthens family relations and builds happy social interactions.

When the Upanishads say *Matri devo bhava* (Mother is God), they remind us of society’s reliance on women to nurture and educate future generations. Children are the culture of tomorrow. The future of the world is largely dependent on the loving care of women. In the role of mothers and teachers, women protect humanity against drugs, criminality, violence and wars. They advance the moral and ethical values of human society, providing examples of what is right and wrong and teaching children about the value of peace.

We encourage parents everywhere not to buy weapon toys and not to let children play games or view videos that glorify guns and fighting. Children do not need these toys; they need love. They do not need material possessions as much as they need the wisdom of adult caregivers. Therefore, we respectfully encourage mothers and fathers, when at all possible, to choose not to leave children alone at home in favour of earning more money. Instead, spend time with children, caring for them. Giving love and wisdom to children gives them the greatest lasting wealth.

In addition, we encourage men to see in all women their own mothers and sisters. If all men could do this, violence against women would stop. Fighting and wars would stop. No mothers would cry because their children became victims of war or crime. No sister would lose her brother in the battlefield or in the streets.

In many countries there is a “Mother’s Day” and a “Father’s Day”. There should also be a day of remembrance and awareness of our universal sister- and brotherhood, beyond all nationalities, cultures and religions.

More than 1.5 billion people in India and around the world observe the Raksha Bandhan festival that takes place every year in August. Sri Swami Madhavananda World Peace Council is therefore submitting the proposal and request to the United Nations, in the name of millions of people, to declare a worldwide “Day of Sisters and Brothers”, commemorated on Raksha Bandhan each year on the day of the full moon in August.

Forty years ago, in his Yoga in Daily Life organization, Paramhans Swami Maheshwarananda explained and introduced the “Day of Sisters and Brothers” idea worldwide among his students and yoga practitioners. Anyone who does not have a brother or sister can “adopt” a good friend whom they vow to revere and protect, thereby enriching both of their lives through expanding family bonds. In particular, the youth are very inspired by this idea and respond enthusiastically to this tradition of sister- and brotherhood.

We declare the intention to celebrate the principles of Raksha Bandhan every day — not just once a year — as a symbol of respect and admiration for all women of the globe. Women are the symbol of Mother, and Mother represents care, protection, love, and the ability to give birth to future generations. Every year, on the holy occasion of Raksha Bandhan, celebrants in many countries resolve that all women of the world should be happy. We encourage this sentiment to be repeated every day, in every country, by everyone. It is our hope that this will bring beautiful change to our world.

The education and protection of women means protection of our world and our future.
