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Commission on the Status of Women

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10-21 March 2014

**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 Catholic Women’s League Australia, 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

As the 2015 target date for achieving the Millennium Development Goals approaches, intergovernmental and United Nations-led processes are well under way to inform and design a post-2015 development agenda and sustainable development goals.

The fifty-eighth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, in 2014, is an important opportunity to identify and promote awareness of the policy priorities and critical issues for women and girls within the post-2015 agenda. Catholic Women's League Australia wishes to emphasize the importance of ensuring that consideration of sustainable development is always focused primarily upon the flourishing of the human person, from conception to natural death, and informed by a notion of gender equality that is grounded in the reality of universal human dignity and the complementarity between men and women.

The first principle of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, adopted at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in June 1992, states that "human beings are at the centre of concerns for sustainable development" and that "they are entitled to a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature". The flourishing and well-being of all members of the human family must be the goal of sustainable development. The welfare of human beings should never be subordinated to environmental concerns. The human person is the agent of sustainable development; he or she must never be regarded as an obstacle to sustainable development. In a position paper for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, the Holy See states:

There is no conflict between human beings and their environment, but rather a stable and inseparable covenant in which the environment conditions the life and development of human beings, while they in turn perfect and ennoble the environment by their creative, productive and responsible labour. It is this covenant which needs to be reinforced; a covenant which respects the dignity of the human being from his or her conception.

Catholic Women's League Australia also opposes any attempt to link the concept of sustainable development to a notion of sexual and reproductive health and rights that is violent to unborn human life and insensitive to the religious and cultural values of women.

Sustainable development must be grounded in a concept of gender equality that is respectful of the dignity of women and focused upon their inherent needs as women.

Such a programme will assist women to understand and manage, but not suppress, their fertility. It will care for pregnant women and help them to bring new human life safely to birth, but not attack their motherhood or cause them to abort their children. It will protect and promote, not bypass, the dignity of motherhood.