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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 Centre for Social Research, 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 Millennium Development Goals have failed to address the pervasive gender imbalance in India. With the 2015 deadline for the attainment of the Goals looming, gender issues continue to be overlooked and discrimination against women remains the norm across the country. Indian women are faced with disadvantage, discrimination and marginalization in all aspects of their lives, reducing their capacity to engage with society and be full and equal citizens.

The achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women are vital for the realization of the human rights of women. Gender is also an issue cutting across other development issues. The achievement of freedom and equality for women is imperative for facilitating social and economic development in India and globally. India faces several specific challenges to the realization of gender equality and the implementation of the Goals.

The devaluation of women and girls is demonstrated by the child sex ratio, which fell to 914 females per 1,000 males in 2011. This is the lowest since India gained independence. There are nearly 600,000 girls missing each year as a result of sex-selective abortions.

The gender divide is also evident in relation to education, employment and health. Despite improvements in education levels in India, women's education is still undervalued and the female literacy rate is 17 per cent lower than the male literacy rate. Poor education and widespread gender discrimination lead women to marginalization in employment. Women are largely relegated to the informal sector, where they have less job security and lower wages. Women are also excluded from positions of power: there are 9,000 listed firms in India, yet only 400 women board members. Indian women are also more likely than men to experience poor health and less likely to receive medical attention. More than half of women suffer from anaemia and the maternal mortality rate is 200 per 100,000 live births.

Despite women's political representation being a clear target of the Goals, women continue to be underrepresented as political leaders and elected officials. Currently, women's representation is just over 10 per cent in the national parliament and 7 per cent in the state assemblies.

Finally, women face a range of safety and security challenges and crime against women is on the rise. Violence against women starts before they are even born in the form of sex-selective abortions and continues throughout their lives. Women are vulnerable to domestic violence, dowry violence, sexual harassment and assault, forced marriage, child marriage and rape, the last-mentioned being the fastest-growing crime in India. More than one third of Indian women experience violence at least once in their lives.

The Goals have failed to address the widespread gender imbalance in Indian society. We cannot allow women to continue to be marginalized and discriminated against. This is a human rights issue and a development issue and must be reflected in the post-2015 development agenda. The United Nations must return its focus to the realization of the Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women and must prioritize investing in and building the capacity of women's rights organizations. Doing so is vital to strengthening women's voices at the local and international levels and to ensuring an active and engaged civil society.

We wish to emphasize that women's organizations were largely excluded from the discussions regarding the Goals, which focused on government action. This approach has not been successful in addressing development concerns, particularly for women. The post-2015 development agenda also cannot be taken away from women's organizations. The process must engage with women's rights activists and other civil society actors and focus on strengthening women's movements and initiatives for achieving gender equality.

Finally, we wish to draw attention to the issue of women's leadership, which has not received adequate attention and continues to be lacking in most democratic countries. We are of the firm belief that, unless women are given equal representation at all levels of leadership, the development agenda will remain a distant dream.

Gender inequality affects 50 per cent of the world's population and is an issue cutting across efforts to achieve social and economic development. It can no longer be ignored and overlooked by Governments, the United Nations and the international community. The post-2015 development agenda must be a feminist agenda and women must be central to its planning and implementation if we are to achieve any real progress towards national and international development targets.
