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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 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.



Statement

Soroptimist International speaks on behalf of over 80,000 women from 3,000 communities across 127 countries. We are founded on the principles of being a global collection of women who join our movement to serve women and girls locally, nationally and internationally. Our positions are based on their voices, perspectives and opinions. We are a bottom-up organization of like-minded individuals who all want the same thing — a world where women and girls together achieve their individual and collective potential, realize aspirations and have an equal voice in creating strong, peaceful communities worldwide.

Soroptimist International has been working towards this goal since 1921 and, while we have seen extraordinary progress in some areas, many of the barriers facing women in 1921 are still prevalent now, albeit in different forms. Women and men still do not have access to the same capabilities, resources or opportunities.

The Millennium Development Goals were ground-breaking. While most, if not all of the goals and targets already existed in international treaties, agreements or platforms for action, never before had the global community, together, agreed on a simple and achievable set of priorities with such clear targets and indicators. The Millennium Development Goals changed what we did and how we did it.

But we have not achieved as much as we could have, particularly for women and girls. Policies and programmes continue to focus on the tangible fixes — increasing enrolment in primary education, improving health services, reducing poverty and increasing food security, making clean water and sanitation part of everyday life, and so on and so forth. While all of the above will have a positive impact and will improve lives, they will never effect lasting change, not without addressing the reasons why the outcomes of these areas are poorer for women than they are for men.

This kind of deeply rooted, structural, behavioural and societal change is not easy to achieve and is clearly the biggest challenge as we move into the next generation of development goals.

Soroptimists posit that there are five key reasons why women and girls are still more resource-poor than their male counterparts, which can be addressed in the post-2015 agenda to make the kind of structural changes that real gender equality demands:

1. The global community knows that what you measure significantly impacts on what you do and how resources are distributed. The Millennium Development Goals did not treat gender as a cross-cutting theme. Indicators for each and every goal should have been disaggregated by gender.
2. Funding and financing were noticeably absent. It is of particular importance, that there was no mention or requirement to deploy gender-responsive budgeting and gender audits.
3. Accountability mechanisms were weak. All involved actors, in particular governments and private institutions, must be held to account for their actions or lack thereof. Naming and shaming is not usually enough.
4. Violence against women and girls was not addressed. As we all know, that is one of the primary barriers to achieving gender equality and ensuring that

women have equal access to resources and security. It is no wonder that the Millennium Development Goals did not achieve what they could have for women and girls.

5. Gender has two sides, yet the Millennium Development Goals focused solely on women and girls. To truly effect change, attention must be paid to working with men and boys and breaking gender stereotypes for women and men. We do not want to gauge women's success by how much their lives look the same as their male counterparts. At the same time, we want men to be able to freely determine the course of their lives without being constrained by male stereotypes. Work on both sides must occur in order to achieve true gender equality.

The members of the global Soroptimist movement believe that the shared vision of a future we want means, essentially, one thing — that no matter where you are born, whether you are male or female, whatever colour your skin is or who your parents are, whatever economic or political climate surrounds you, it is your human right to be free to achieve your fullest potential, and it is the global community's responsibility to ensure that you have the tools to do so.
