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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 African Centre for Democracy, 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

Joint Statement to promote a global development strategy based on human rights

The Center for Women's Global Leadership at Rutgers University, New Jersey, United States of America, and women's and human rights organizations dedicated to gender equity and women's empowerment, welcome the fifty-eighth session of the Commission on the Status of Women and States' consideration of the priority theme of the challenges and achievements in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls and the review theme of access and participation of women and girls to education, transportation, science and technology, including equal access to full employment and decent work and the global development agenda.

For many years, we have worked to develop and facilitate women's leadership for women's human rights and social justice worldwide, calling attention to the critical importance of working toward the full realization of women's economic, social and cultural and political and civil rights. Collectively and individually, we have worked to call on Governments and all other development actors to utilize international human rights to provide a clear and universally recognized framework in the design, implementation and monitoring of economic policies and programmes.

Development is a gendered process that affects women and men differently. A human rights framework offers a method to access the development strategies relevant for women and girls that are specifically addressed by the Millennium Development Goals: primary education, gender equality and women's empowerment, maternal health, and decent work.

The world has dramatically changed since the Millennium Development Goals were created. The global financial crisis of 2008 has wreaked havoc on livelihoods. The promotion of austerity policies to deal with the consequent increases in government budget deficits has led to the erosion of economic and social rights for both developing and developed countries alike. Although large reductions in extreme poverty have occurred since the Millennium Development Goals were enacted, food vulnerability can be seen in both developed and developing countries. For example, in 2008, 24 per cent of people in developing countries were still extremely poor, living on less than \$1.25 a day. As a result of the crisis, in some developed countries, low income families are increasingly dependent on food banks and other food assistance strategies each month in order to survive. The failure of key Governments to implement adequate regulation of financial markets and institutions during the three decades leading up to the crisis is a failure to meet the human rights obligation of the State to protect rights from the actions of third parties that might threaten those rights.

Inequality within and between countries has increased and women continue to face highly unequal outcomes across the globe. Unemployment and underemployment have increased and put further downward pressure on working conditions and benefits, and shrinking wages and rising costs of living have pushed further into the distance the achievement of gender equality and women's empowerment, as called for in the Millennium Development Goals. The fact that there are more women in the workplace has not necessarily meant better working

conditions and pay, but more exploitation and vulnerability. Women make up a large percentage of workers forced to migrate within their own countries or to other countries in search of a liveable wage while at the same time opening themselves up to possibilities of violence and discrimination. Higher and more volatile food prices created by unchecked speculation in international commodity markets undermine women's living standards and incomes as the producers of primary products, thus increasing the risk of hunger and women's abilities to care for their families.

The Millennium Development Goal framers could not foresee these realities. The crisis demonstrates that the action or lack of action by one country can affect the realization of rights elsewhere. The critical importance of a global partnership for development articulated in Goal 8 takes on new significance in the light of current global economic realities. The pivotal role that the macroeconomic environment plays in realizing social goals and objectives is clearer than ever before and must be taken into account and incorporated as part of a coherent development strategy in the future. The realization of human rights for all people in all countries is impossible without an enabling global economic environment committed to the realization of economic and social rights.

International human rights covenants and conventions and the declarations and programmes of action on human rights, population and development, social development, equality development and peace provide principles for setting benchmarks for assessing the extent to which people are deprived of their rights, and benchmarks for assessing the extent to which policy has been conducted in ways to realize rights.

We call on Member States to implement their agreed conclusions, respect international human rights law and agreements and commit to the principles and goals within them.

On the issue of taking a human rights approach, we strongly urge Member States to:

- Enhance the recognition of State obligations to respect, protect and fulfil human rights and to commit to the principles of progressive realization, maximum available resources, non-retrogression, minimum essential levels/minimum core obligations, and non-discrimination and equality
- Create clear regulations to ensure that economic interests and conditions do not undermine respect for human rights and sustainable development

On the issue of gender equality and linking goals to women's complex realities, we strongly urge Member States to:

- Address both the public and private spheres of women's lives, including use of temporary special measures to address a history of disadvantage, and measure the opportunity of outcomes not just opportunity, with a particular attention to women's unpaid work
- Adopt measures to promote women's empowerment in the labour market that look to the enforcement of labour rights, the quality of employment and the volatility of earnings
- Expand the assessment of the realization of women's reproductive rights and freedom from violence

- Develop tools to address the new forms of racism, nationalism, sexism and xenophobia arising in all countries that are leading to new forms of retrenchments as a result of the economic crisis and that are threatening the achievement of social and economic rights
- Expand the use of tools to assess gender equality and empowerment to take into account the intersection of gender with other forms of disadvantage, such as race, class, ethnicity and sexuality

On the issue of macro-level policies and envisioning a common global enabling environment where macroeconomic policy contributes to mobilizing resources for economic and social rights fulfilment, we strongly urge Member States to:

- Fulfil the obligation to protect by the effective regulation of financial institutions to prevent economic crises
- Evaluate macroeconomic policy with regard to the principle of non-discrimination and equality to eliminate gender bias
- Integrate unpaid care work and social reproduction into the formulation and evaluation of macroeconomic policies
- Avoid macroeconomic policies that exacerbate inequalities along the lines of socioeconomic status, race, caste and ethnicity

On the issue of national-level monitoring and accountability for developing and developed countries, utilizing established human rights covenants and conventions criteria in evaluation, we strongly urge Member States to:

- Secure robust evaluations and comparisons with other countries, taking into account diverse economic structures
- Consider the incorporation of the Maastricht Principles on Extraterritorial Obligations in the area of economic, social and cultural rights, which outline a State's obligations relating to acts and omissions (administrative, legislative, adjudicatory and other measures) that have effects on the enjoyment of human rights outside that State's territory
- Assess development policies to look beyond individual strategies (poverty-alleviation, health and well-being) to macroeconomic frameworks that together influence the success of individual programmes, including government expenditure, government revenue, development assistance (both social development assistance and private resource flows), debt and deficit financing and monetary policy and financial regulation
- Encourage the development of different strategies for different national and local realities in order to address global imbalances and inequalities in access and opportunity
- Evaluate trade multilateral, bilateral and regional agreements with regard to their impacts on economic and social rights
- Hold accountable multinational corporations, credit rating agencies and international banks, as important actors in the global economic environment, for the realization of human rights

We call on the Commission on the Status of Women to facilitate leadership to support States in fulfilling their human rights obligations. We remain committed to working with the United Nations in building a world where the human rights of all are fully realized.

Note: The statement is endorsed by the following non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Council: Human Rights Studies, African Women's Development and Communication Network, Agricultural Missions, Ain o Salish Kendra, Alliance for Africa, Armenian International Women's Association, Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women, Association for Women's Rights in Development, Association of War-Affected Women, Be Active, Be Emancipated, Bangladesh Nari Progati Sangha, Canadian Federation of University Women, CARE International, Caribbean Association for Feminist Research and Action, Center for Women's Global Leadership, Colectiva Mujer y Salud, Collectif sénégalais des Africaines pour la promotion de l'éducation relative à l'environnement, Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, Engender, Equality Now, Equidad de Género: Ciudadania, Trabajo y Familia, European Women's Lobby, Federation of Women Lawyers in Kenya, Flora Tristan Peruvian Women's Center, Foodfirst Information and Action Network, Forum for Women and Development, Fundación para Estudio e Investigación de la Mujer, Global Fund for Women, Global Justice Center, ISIS: Women's International Cross-Cultural Exchange, International Alliance of Women, International Council for Adult Education, International Federation of Women Lawyers, International Federation of Women in Legal Careers, International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission, International Women's Anthropology Conference, International Women's Health Coalition, International Women's Rights Action Watch Asia Pacific, Madre, Niger Delta Women's Movement for Peace and Development, Programme on Women's Economic Social and Cultural Rights, Public Services International, Soroptimist International, Stree Mukti Sanghatana, Tandem Project, Temple of Understanding, US Human Rights Network, United Methodist Church General Board of Global Ministries, Urban Justice Center, Women and Modern World Centre, Women for Human Rights, Single Women Group, Women for Women's Human Rights: New Ways, Women in Law and Development in Africa, Women's Consortium of Nigeria, Women's Global Network for Reproductive Rights, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, Working Women Association, World Young Women's Christian Association and Zonta International.