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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 Anglican Consultative Council, Association of Presbyterian Women of Aotearoa (New Zealand), Church Women United, Lutheran World Federation, Presbyterian Church USA, Salvation Army, Society of Catholic Medical Missionaries, United Church of Christ Board for World Ministries, United Methodist Church General Board of Global Ministries, World Student Christian Federation and World Young Women’s Christian Association, non-governmental organizations 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

We envision a human community where the participation of everyone is valued, where no one is excluded on the basis of race, ethnicity, sex, age, religion or cultural practice, and where diversity is celebrated as God's gift to the world.

We remind the fifty-eighth session of the Commission on the Status of Women of the important role that faith-based organizations have played in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals, including food programmes, education, health care, housing, water and sanitation, capacity-building for women and girls and much more. Our network's pursuit of the Millennium Development Goals provides a unique vision of our achievements and the challenges still ahead.

We realize that the Millennium Development Goals, although well-intentioned, remain treatments rather than the cure. Large-scale social and economic transformation, partnerships and political will are required if we are to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. We recognize that significant yet unequal progress has been made and that existing commitments must be met. We affirm that the promotion of gender equality from a human rights perspective and the contributions and empowerment of women and girls of all ages are fundamental, as enshrined in the Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing Platform for Action) and international laws, and are necessary to meet the Millennium Development Goals and contribute to a post-2015 agenda that will ensure gender justice and sustainable development.

We wish to highlight the four areas of achievement and challenges below.

Poverty and hunger

Poverty and hunger continue to plague our societies. Although successive progress reports on the Millennium Development Goals demonstrate that significant gains have been made in lessening the number of persons who live in extreme poverty or hunger, there is more to do.

Traditional aid programmes have failed to address the root causes of poverty and hunger around world. Without confronting social and economic discrimination, the wealthy will continue to grow exponentially wealthier while the poor will continue to remain marginalized.

The current socioeconomic system is broken. The system continues to pursue micro-level solutions to macro-level problems. In its 2011 report entitled "Global food losses and food waste", the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations reports that roughly one third of food produced for human consumption is lost or wasted globally, which amounts to about 1.3 billion tons per year. This inevitably also means that huge amounts of the resources used in food production are used in vain, and that the greenhouse gas emissions caused by production of food that gets lost or wasted are also emissions in vain. A significant portion of this waste occurs in the global North. The Millennium Development Goals failed to recognize the effects of donor country actions, decisions and inactions on aid recipient countries. With people dying of hunger daily and food being thrown away, Governments must take urgent action to reform an unjust system.

We recommend that Governments:

(a) Recognize that the problems of hunger and food insecurity have global dimensions and that they are likely to persist and even to increase dramatically in some regions unless action is taken, given the anticipated increase in the world's population and the stress on natural resources;

(b) Express concern that women and girls are disproportionately affected by hunger, food insecurity and poverty, in part as a result of gender inequality and cultural stereotypes that lead many families to privilege boys. In many countries, girls are twice as likely as boys to die from malnutrition and preventable childhood disease; it is estimated that almost twice as many women as men suffer from malnutrition;

(c) Encourage all Member States to achieve progressively the full realization of the right to food, including steps to promote the conditions for everyone to be free from hunger and, to create and adopt national plans to combat hunger;

(d) Request all Member States as well as international organizations to take fully into account that women produce 60 to 80 per cent of food in most developing countries and are responsible for half of global food production. The incorporation of a gender perspective in all aspects of the measures to eradicate poverty and ensure the right to food for all is essential to reducing the vulnerability of women and girls.

Access to quality education, employment and decision-making

Whether in the public or private spheres, from the highest levels of government decision-making to households, women continue to be denied equal opportunity with men to participate in decisions that affect their lives. Existing institutional structures and cultural barriers are inherently gender-biased and need to be critically examined and radically transformed. Institutional barriers — in Government, corporate, social, academic, educational, civil, familial and religious institutional structures — prohibit equality between women and men and deny women's rights.

Discrimination against women and girls and their lack of decision-making power allows the inequality between women and men to continue.

While resources have been put into primary education, women's limited access to secondary, technical and post-secondary education continues. This diminishes the chance for full inclusion in economic, political and social decision-making.

We recommend that Governments:

(a) Remove economic barriers to women's educational opportunities and promote an equitable sharing of authority and responsibilities in family life, work and society, as well as equal access to economic and political power;

(b) Remove legal and other obstacles to women's ownership of land and inheritance, and gender discrimination in lending practices and in access to social security and pensions;

(c) Invest in domestic agriculture, where women predominate, and ensure spaces for women's active and meaningful participation in macroeconomic policymaking and decision-making.

Health

The faith community has provided a broad spectrum of health services, including maternal and child health services, which have contributed to the achievements in the related Millennium Development Goals. Great advancements have been seen in respect of health issues, but access by women and girls to adequate health services, especially sexual and reproductive health services, remains unmet and of vital importance.

Lack of basic medical care and nutritional supplements, high rates of maternal and infant mortality, and the continued spread of HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and other diseases means that many women and girls needlessly suffer or die, and countless others serve as caregivers for their families and community.

Caregiving work is most often unpaid and undervalued. Improving access to medical services and ensuring that caregivers are financially supported would lighten the heavy burden women and girls take on and allow them to contribute more broadly to their communities.

We recommend that Governments:

(a) Affirm the human rights of women, including their right to access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health education and services, free from discrimination and violence;

(b) Promote equal relationships between women and men in matters of sexual relations and reproduction, including full respect for the integrity of the person and mutual respect, consent and shared responsibility for sexual behaviour and its consequences.

Violence against women and girls

Violence against women and girls in both rich and poor countries continues to challenge the global development agenda. We recognize that some States have made progress in addressing widespread violence. We also acknowledge that despite numerous United Nations actions, violence against women and girls persists as a gross human rights violation. We assert that much more needs to be done to create a transformative shift in social norms and behaviour.

Vulnerable populations were left out of the Millennium Development Goals and the development framework. Attention must be focused especially on providing protection and resources to refugees and internally displaced persons.

The cultural acceptance of discrimination leads to structural discrimination, whereby basic social structures form a bias against women and girls. A lack of representation in leadership and governance means that women cannot effectively represent themselves and their needs. Many Governments adopt national legislation to end violence against women and girls, but fail to implement it. We recognize such implementation to be especially important when many violent acts occur in private. States must work actively to ensure that law enforcement and judicial systems prevent and punish all kinds of violence against women and girls.

We therefore recommend that Governments, the United Nations system and civil society organizations:

- Eliminate and prevent all forms of violence against women as stipulated in Recommendation No. 19 of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.
- Implement Security Council resolutions [1325 \(2000\)](#), [1820 \(2008\)](#), [1888 \(2009\)](#), [1889 \(2009\)](#), [1960 \(2010\)](#) and [2106 \(2013\)](#).
- Ensure that marginalized women and girls are integrated into decision-making processes with respect to the creation of laws, policies and programmes that affect them.
- Promote women's empowerment and gender equality by transforming structures of inequality and by making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is eliminated.

The ecumenical community effectively has been pursuing the ideals of the Millennium Development Goals for centuries and we will continue to pursue a just development system long after 2015. We encourage Member States to continue to work towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals as well as to look to the Commission on the Status of Women to acknowledge that a transformative change must take place in order to achieve equality and to generate a more peaceful and prosperous future for all.
