



## Economic and Social Council

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### Commission on the Status of Women

#### Fifty-eighth session

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 Apne Aap Women Worldwide (India) Trust, Coalition against Trafficking in Women, Equality Now and European Women’s Lobby, 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

Our organizations, all working to promote women's rights and equality between women and men, decided to come together to issue the following joint statement. We very much welcome the decision by the Commission on the Status of Women to address "Challenges and achievements in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls" as the priority theme of its fifty-eighth session.

Indeed, we are standing at a crucial time in the global discussion on the new development agenda that will take over from the Millennium Development Goals, expiring in 2015; in 2014, the International Conference on Population and Development will celebrate 20 years of its Programme of Action and the promotion of women's sexual and reproductive health and rights; 2015 will also see the celebration of 20 years of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, one of the most important United Nations instruments for women's rights. In this context, the outcomes of the Commission's session will be instrumental in setting the tone of the future for all women and girls on this planet.

### **A stand-alone goal on women's rights and equality between women and men**

For us, the starting point of the reflexion is that any strong transformative new global agenda for peace and development requires that women's rights and equality between women and men be placed at the core of the policies and actions to which United Nations Member States commit. All recent reports and declarations at all levels, including the European level, point to the fact that no global development policy will deliver if women's rights and equality between women and men are not guaranteed. It is now time to transform words into action: women and girls from all over the world cannot wait another 20 years! This can only be achieved through a stand-alone goal on women's rights and equality between women and men, and concrete gender targets and indicators in the new development agenda that reflect the changes needed in order to achieve gender equality. Such commitment should materialize at all levels, including through guaranteeing adequate and sustainable financing for women's rights and gender equality in the budgets of Governments at all levels, as well as the budgets of the European Union, the United Nations and other international organizations.

For us, the post-2015 development framework must effectively guarantee the full spectrum of women's rights. The stand-alone goal has to address all aspects of women's lives, promoting women's economic independence and the equal representation of women and men in all aspects of decision-making, guaranteeing women's access to education, health care and resources, and protecting women and girls from all forms of male violence. Not one single girl or woman should be left behind! It is crucial to take into account the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination experienced by many women and girls around the world.

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has acknowledged that the impact of globalization and of policies, such as the deregulation of economies and the privatization of the public sector, have tended to reinforce economic inequalities between women and men, especially within marginalized communities. Women's rights are intimately linked to the three pillars of sustainable development: economic, social and environmental. Moreover, gender inequality is both structural

and systemic, deeply rooted in the structures of all societies and existing from the community level right up to international institutions. This is why we demand a clear commitment to implement gender mainstreaming in all goals, targets and indicators of the new agenda to complement specific actions to promote women's rights.

**Equality between women and men: a universal goal, with no exception, justification or excuse**

In a context of the global economic, social and environmental crisis, the United Nations and its Member States have a duty to protect women and girls worldwide and to reaffirm their commitment to existing United Nations agreed language and instruments on women's rights and equality between women and men. Women's rights and equality between women and men are universal goals that cannot tolerate any exception, justification or excuse. Our organizations and their members are expecting Member States to listen to their voices and expertise and to agree on conclusions, building on existing international human rights instruments while at the same time reinforcing commitments to answer new challenges at all levels and providing concrete steps for further action.

We are witnessing a growing profound and structural movement of antifeminist and conservative ideas, affecting all policies in all continents. This movement contests the goal of equality between women and men, develops argumentation based on religion, tradition or culture to legitimize violations of women's rights, and challenges universal human rights and the global solidarity for women's rights. This is why we strongly call on the United Nations and its Member States to support the following specific recommendations, in order to guarantee women's human rights and equal participation in political, economic and social life in all countries:

(a) Ending all forms of violence against women and girls should be a priority within the stand-alone goal, with targets and indicators enabling real progress on women's lives. There can be no excuse, custom, tradition or religious consideration used to violate women's rights and legitimize male violence. Violence against women cannot be considered a private issue; it is a human rights issue. We call on all Member States to reiterate their commitment to end all forms of violence against women and girls, in order to reach the highest level of equality, development and peace for all;

(b) Prostitution is one of the most archaic manifestations of the unequal power relation between women and men: it supports the perpetuation of hegemonic masculinity, while giving ground to increased trafficking and institutionalizing organized crime. Member States have already affirmed the key human rights principle that prostitution and the accompanying evil of the traffic in persons for the purpose of prostitution are incompatible with the dignity and worth of the human person (Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others). Any proposal to legalize, decriminalize or regulate "sex work" would lead to the normalization of violence against women and the violation of women's dignity. We demand progressive policies to protect all women and girls from prostitution, decriminalize those in prostitution, and address the demand that fuels sexual exploitation and trafficking;

(c) Universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights should continue to be a policy priority. This includes no negotiation on access to sexuality education, free access to all methods of safe contraception, and safe and legal abortion. The violation of women's sexual and reproductive rights is a violation of basic human rights and cannot be tolerated. All individuals and families, whatever the form, should be able to fully enjoy these rights and benefit from the highest standards of sexual and reproductive health, free from coercion, violence or discrimination.

#### **A committed and united European Union**

Finally, we hope to see the European Union take a strong stance at the Commission on the Status of Women, speak with one voice to defend a progressive agenda for women's rights and equality between women and men, and lead the work towards ambitious 2013 conclusions. We would like to remind the European Union member States of their commitment to a post-2015 agenda that also addresses justice, equality and equity, good governance, democracy and the rule of law, with a strong focus on the empowerment and rights of women and girls and gender equality, and on preventing and combating violence against women as essential preconditions for equitable and inclusive sustainable development, as well as important values and objectives in themselves (2013 European Union Council Conclusions on the Overarching Post-2015 Agenda).

All the European Union member States should be united in the realization of the European Union core values of equality between women and men, democracy and peace. In the twenty-first century, it is time for the European Union to take the global development agenda seriously and to make women's rights and equality between women and men a reality within Europe, as a unique contribution to development, peace and equality.