



## Economic and Social Council

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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”**

### **Statement submitted by National Alliance of Women’s Organizations, 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.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

The National Alliance of Women's Organization believes that international conventions such as the Beijing Platform for Action and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women are vitally important for the achievement of women's rights globally and seek to translate these into the lives and aspirations of women and girls.

Much has been achieved since 1995. However, much more remains to be done to ensure that globally, women of all ages and girls, are able to enjoy their full human rights.

Challenges include cyclical and dangerous changes in the global economy. Governments apply cuts that impact disproportionately on women and girls especially in regard to women's poverty, disability, education and employment opportunities. World demographics have shifted with an increasingly aging population. Millions continue to suffer from poverty and dangerous illnesses such as HIV/AIDS and Ebola. Religious extremism and fundamentalism has grown with belief systems that disadvantage and oppress women and girls.

Opportunities abound, such as through technology and entrepreneurship. Many women are taking advantage of the Internet, but others lack access or are denied education and robust health care.

We call on the United Nations and all governments to fully implement the Beijing Platform for Action, recommendations of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and other international instruments. The commitment to "gender mainstreaming" of all United Nations and government policies and programmes, including gender budgeting, and the provision of special programmes for women and girls, has not been implemented. We call for this to be reinforced as an important means for meeting the practical and strategic needs of women and the achievement of their full human rights. The advancement of women and girls is not merely an ideal for a well-ordered society but vital to the achievement of global peace and prosperity.

Over the years, there has been a struggle to keep the language of the Beijing Platform for Action in the face of efforts by some states parties to dilute it. We call on the United Nations and all states parties to ensure that all United Nations documents take the Beijing Platform for Action as the baseline and seek to ensure any new conventions, treaties or resolutions make robust provision for women and girls.

The United Nations has strengthened its own structure with the creation of United Nations Women as a strategic department, with its head at the United Nations top table. United Nations Women needs to be supported, strengthened and provided with robust funding.

Men continue to dominate the political landscape of central government and in United Nations leadership roles, despite women's leading role in civil society organisations and contribution to local governance systems. An increasing proportion of the population, women amongst them, have become increasingly disillusioned with political systems and feel unable to influence policies.

There has been widespread rolling back of government commitments to gender equality. This has been accompanied by the reduction in funding to, or abolition of, “gender architecture”: essential to give women and girls of all backgrounds and abilities, from grassroots to the most organised, a voice and hold governments to account. We call on all states parties to provide robust resources for mechanisms enabling the voices of women of all ages and girls to be heard and heeded.

There is a greater recognition of the many forms of violence against women and girls, yet it is endemic and increasing in all countries. It has been exacerbated in some parts of the world by conflict, in which women of all ages are raped and assaulted, often forced to flee. We applaud the United Kingdom government for taking the initiative in hosting the “Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict” in 2014. We urge all governments to implement the agreements made there regarding all countries involved in conflict. We call upon governments to recognise the impact of sexual violence in conflict on refugee women and those seeking asylum and to admit them as they seek security. We call for punishment of perpetrators and provision of all necessary support and health services for survivors.

Domestic abuse continues to be widespread. We call upon all countries to ratify the Istanbul Convention or create legislation that emulates it.

We support and advocate for key abolitionist principles to be applied to the prostitution of women and girls: prostitution represents a fundamental violation of women’s human rights, is a notable impediment to equality and demonstrates male violence against women. It is essential to understand force not only as coercion with a physical weapon or imprisonment but also experienced through a range of behaviours. The trafficking of women for prostitution both across borders and within countries is a violation of their rights and leads to further violence.

We call for legislation to end prostitution (the penalisation of the demand for commercial sex, coercion and control; decriminalisation of individuals in prostitution and provision of support services to assist in exit). This “Nordic Model” is effective in preventing sexual exploitation, including trafficking for this purpose. We call for the United Nations to define prostitution as violence against women and to ensure that “forced prostitution” is understood in the widest sense of coercion (cf para. 113c and 122 in Beijing Platform for Action).

Progress is being made to tackle female genital mutilation, child marriage and forced marriage. In some countries, educational awareness and prosecution of perpetrators is bearing positive fruit. It is important that these practices are clearly viewed as violations of women’s human rights and not as acceptable cultural practices.

There is a need for full recognition of the abuses against widows, young and old, and the fact that widows and women who head households are a resource, not a liability. They need to be recognised and included in social budgeting and aid programmes.

The Beijing Platform for Action recognised that women are not a homogenous group and have differing needs. In particular, we call for recognition of the diversity of women, the special disadvantage and barriers to rights and full participation experienced by women with disabilities, and the needs of young women and older women.

We call for full recognition of the role that older women play in society and of their particular needs. Older women's contribution to unpaid care, their role in politics and in community work demands recognition. In the light of the growth in populations living longer, proper access to health care and other means of support are essential. The expertise of older women needs to be fully utilised, for example in the implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 and its successors.

Young women are the basis for the future. In the United Kingdom, young women themselves are asking for:

- Greater opportunities for involvement in politics
- More education on gender equality and sexual relationships
- More support for young people who are from ethnic minorities and/or identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender
- Full reproductive rights including the right and access to free and lawful abortion
- Equal job opportunities and equal pay

We call for the end of media stereotyping which:

- Shows older women as a burden on society or renders them invisible
- Objectifies and sexualises young women
- Gives little attention to the voice of women

A disproportionate burden of care and unpaid labour is still carried out by women. Progress has been made in reducing the pay gap in many countries but this continues to escape solution. Legislation, local rules, and/or Temporary Special Measures, as advocated by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, are essential.

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