



## Economic and Social Council

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### Commission on the Status of Women

#### Fifty-ninth session

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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 Personhood Education and Vida y Familia de Guadalajara, 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.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

On behalf of Vida y Familia de Guadalajara, a private Mexican welfare institution helping pregnant women achieve their rightful dignity and social integration, and Personhood Education, a civil and human rights advocacy group engaged in the social policy debate at the United Nations, we welcome the twenty-year review of the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing+20).

Since the Beijing conference in 1995, more women are receiving the benefits of education than ever before. Rising levels of education among women has contributed to improvements in maternal health and the decline of maternal mortality in many developing countries, particularly in Latin America.

A 2012 PLoS ONE study conducted by Chilean Maternal Mortality Research Initiative found that rising levels of life-long education for women were the primary cause of declining maternal mortality rates between 1957 and 2007. For every additional year of maternal education Chilean women received, there was a corresponding decrease in the maternal mortality rate of 29.3 per 100,000 live births. During the fifty-year period under study, the overall maternal mortality rate dramatically declined by 93.8 per cent, from 270.7 to 18.2 deaths per 100,000 live births, making Chile a leader in maternal healthcare outcomes in the Americas.

Member States should facilitate “access to appropriate health-care services that will enable women to go safely through pregnancy and childbirth and provide couples with the best chance of having a healthy infant” (Platform for Action 94, 97, and Beijing+5 72-i).” The primary direct causes of maternal mortality are haemorrhage, infection, high blood pressure, and obstructed labour. These conditions often stem from poverty, lack of education, and lack of access to critical health care infrastructure (such as skilled birth attendants) to provide adequate prenatal, perinatal, and postnatal care. Therefore, governments ought to prioritize “ready access to essential obstetric care, well-equipped and adequately staffed maternal health-care services” (Beijing+5, 72-b).

National governments must take concrete legislative steps to promote the dignity and rights of the girl child both before and after birth. Gender-based violence, including prenatal sex-selection, is “incompatible with the dignity and worth of the human person and must be combated and eliminated” (Beijing+5: 59).

We affirm that the natural family is “the basic unit of society and is a strong force for social cohesion and integration and as such should be strengthened” (Platform for Action 60). We must encourage the growth of strong families, in which both mothers and fathers are encouraged to ensure “access to and attainment of educational qualifications” necessary for girls to become women who are “agents of change.” (Platform for Action 69). Particularly in the realm of sexuality education, “parental support and guidance” are essential elements for “adolescents ... to deal in a positive and responsible way with their sexuality” (Beijing+5, 267).

We regret that the average age of first-marriage has continued to rise in many developed countries over the past twenty years. This has contributed toward the alarming decline in birth rates among developed countries, which in turn leads to economic stagnation and social instability.

In the corporate sector, corporations such as Facebook and Apple are paying to freeze their female employees' eggs in order to encourage them to devote their child-bearing years to work rather than family. While purporting to provide women with fertility-extending options, they are in reality coercing women to delay childbirth until an age when it poses more health risks in order to succeed in the workplace. By offering to pay \$20,000 to freeze eggs, Facebook is sending the message that a woman's career might be hindered if she decides to have a child earlier rather than later. Multinational corporations should never be involved in the decision about when to start a family.

To counteract these trends, governments should take steps to promote marriage and natural fertility growth. Young men and women should not be discouraged by various social pressures from marrying and starting a family. Rather, the "significance of maternity, motherhood and the role of parents in the family and in the upbringing of children should be acknowledged" and promoted (Platform for Action 29). Public policy must respect "motherhood and fatherhood and the role of parents and legal guardians in the family and in the upbringing of children" (Platform for Action 60).

Over the past twenty years, we have seen many advances for women and girls in achieving the goals of the Beijing Platform for Action. Yet it is just as true today as it was in 1995 that "women make a great contribution to the welfare of the family and to the development of society, which is still not recognized or considered in its full importance" (Platform for Action 29). Twenty years from now, we envision a future in which women's contribution to family welfare and social development is fully appreciated and supported by Member States and civil society.

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