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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 Christian Aid, 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.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Christian Aid welcomes the opportunity to submit a statement to the 59th session of the Commission on the Status of Women.

The realization of women's rights remains the big unfinished business of our times, crucial to the full realization of human rights and essential to truly sustainable development. Successfully responding to other challenges humanity faces, including tackling climate change and reducing economic inequality, cannot abstract from realizing women's rights.

Next year, 2015, will be a crucial one for humanity as governments negotiate agreements on sustainable development goals and climate change. We reiterate the importance of the Beijing Platform for Action and strongly urge member states to reaffirm their obligation to it, put gender equality at the heart of their actions and accelerate progress towards realizing women's rights. This will mean also ensuring that mechanisms for financing development are enabling to the realization of women's rights.

Challenges to the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action

Twenty years ago, the Beijing Platform for Action provided a powerful framework to advance women's rights globally and in all aspects of life. Evidence demonstrates that such global agreements are useful to women's rights organisations and civil society to hold governments accountable. However, implementation at the national level has been patchy and despite some progress, statistics on the status of women globally still make for a shocking read:

- Women keep earning less than men for equal work and are over represented in low paid and precarious employment;
- 35 per cent of women worldwide experience either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence;
- Globally less than 22 per cent of parliamentarians are women;
- Globally on average 1 in 5 women has an unmet need for family planning.

At the national level, Christian Aid and our partners strongly call for greater efforts to prioritize action to fulfil women's rights and to tackle those social norms that discriminate against women. For example, in Bolivia our partners are supporting women local leaders in exercising true leadership and protecting themselves from violence by targeting the judicial system to be more effective in the way it applies protection laws. In Iraq, our partner runs the only shelters for women at risk of honour killing that can be accessed immediately, without a police referral. They also successfully campaigned for a change in the law that now equals honour killings to murder, where they were before carrying only a three months sentence. Women's rights organization and civil society, including faith groups, play a crucial role in closing the implementation gap and should be resourced adequately and listened to.

Our partners in the Philippines and India produce shadow reports to governments' budgets to highlight the gaps in financing gender equality. Gender responsive budgeting is used successfully in a number of countries, such as Nepal, Bangladesh and Rwanda, to track expenditure towards gender equality across

different government agencies. However, designated resources to women's rights are unacceptably low, at about 0.4 per cent of Gross Domestic Product and even 0.2 per cent in some countries.

Donor support to gender equality as well has not matched the ambition of the Beijing Declaration. The Millennium Development Goals have brought about an upward trend in aid aimed at gender equality, concentrated especially in education and health but other areas of women's rights such as economic empowerment and sexual and reproductive health and rights have face consistent funding gaps. According to the analysis of the OECD's Development Assistance Committee's, the share of aid in support of family planning has declined as a share of aid to population policies and programmes from 71 per cent in 1995 to around 20 per cent in 2011. In 2009-10 the share of aid flows from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development Member States towards gender equality still accounted for only 31 per cent of total bilateral aid allocated by sector.

The enabling environment to realize women's rights

There is a renewed momentum globally for gender equality. In particular, there is a recognition of the crucial role women can play as economic actors, often defined as 'untapped resources' to pursue economic development by donors, multilaterals, governments and the private sector. Indeed more and more women are joining the workforce but for many women work does not equal empowerment. In South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, more than 80 per cent of women work in vulnerable employment and globally women still spend at least twice as much time as men on unpaid care work.

A radical change is needed to ensure that work for women is truly empowering and a conduit to gender equality.

The unpaid care that women and girls provide sustains society, and indeed the market economy, yet it has been overlooked and taken for granted by public policy and development approaches. Social norms that hold women back from participating as equals in life need to be tackled at all levels, starting with the household. Public policy has a strong role to play in providing resources and incentives for change by consistently checking its intended outcomes against gender equality. As Member States agree how to finance the post 2015 development goals there is a need to prioritize progressive fiscal policy to provide resources to tackle discriminatory social norms that prevent women's participation in all aspects of economic, political and social life.

In 2013, the Africa Progress Report highlighted that Africa lost about 5.7 per cent of Gross Domestic Product to illicit outflows over 10 years. At the same time, the International Monetary Fund has been advising countries to set up Value Added Tax as an efficient way to raise tax revenues. A study found that in Vietnam Value Added Tax discriminated against women entrepreneurs whose earnings were only 67 per cent of their male counterparts while they bore 105 per cent of the cost. Despite this, female-led small enterprises were still contributing between 40 and 60 per cent of household income. Macroeconomic policies are still too rarely analysed from a gender perspective but have a huge impact on both women's income and on the resources that governments have available to spend for gender equality. Reforms to tax systems at national and global levels are urgently needed if

we are to equitably and sustainably finance a new development agenda with women's rights at the centre.

We believe that the path towards the realization of women's rights and gender equality cannot be separated from the wider macroeconomic policy environment. Strong ambition to realize women's rights at all level cannot be fulfilled until resources are raised and spent progressively and sustainably.

Recommendations

As Member States reaffirm the commitments made in Beijing they have a unique opportunity to give a boost to the realization of women's rights by agreeing to a truly progressive post 2015 framework. Christian Aid and partners urge Member States to:

Put women's rights at the centre of the new development framework by:

- Agreeing on a stand-alone goal to achieve gender equality and women's rights;
- Setting a target to end violence against women and girls;
- Setting a target to promote the role of women and girls in leadership and decision-making;
- Setting a target to ensure economic justice for women and girls, including equal pay for equal work and access to productive assets, and recognition of unpaid care;
- Setting a target on gender-responsive budgeting;
- Mainstreaming gender into other areas including health, education, natural-resource management, energy access, peacebuilding, accountable governance and access to justice. This should include specific targets on maternal mortality and on sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Deliver an enabling environment for the realization of women's rights by:

- Agreeing on a stand-alone goal for a fair global economic system with targets aimed at tackling illicit financial flows and delivering global tax justice;
- Agreeing a 'data revolution' to ensure the collection of disaggregated data by income, gender, age and by all relevant social groups, including indigenous communities, ethnicity and caste;
- Agreeing to targets to promote the use of progressive fiscal policy and the implementation of universal social protection floors;
- Committing to improve to 100 per cent the share of tax and budget laws and policies subject to periodic, participatory gender equality analysis and public expenditure tracking, especially as they impact poor women;
- Improving performance and accountability of public financial management scores and decrease reported rates of corruption in basic public services and social policies, disaggregated by gender, social groups and regions.