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Statement submitted by Asociación Cubana de las Naciones Unidas (Cuban United Nations Association), 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

Contribution of Asociación Cubana de las Naciones Unidas (Cuban United Nations Association), a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), for the twentieth-anniversary review of the Beijing Platform for Action (Beijing+20 — the fifty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW))

The Cuban United Nations Association (ACNU) is a non-profit non-governmental organization which was founded on 30 May 1947, pursuant to the principles and purposes of the World Federation of United Nations Associations (WFUNA). It has had special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC) since 1999; it is a member of the Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations, of the Department of Public Information; and it is also an observer of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Convention to Combat Drought and Desertification. The Association's main functions and objectives include the dissemination and promotion of knowledge and popular understanding of the purposes and principles, nature, functioning and activity of the United Nations System; dissemination of Cuba's participation and activity within the United Nations System, and the maintenance and promotion of relations and exchanges with the World Federation, the Pro-United Nations Associations of other countries, and other similar entities. It also collaborates and coordinates with other civil society organizations and their more than 130 associate bodies, including NGOs in consultative status with ECOSOC, on relevant United Nations topics and in consonance with the international commitments assumed by Cuba.

The Cuban United Nations Association salutes the forty-ninth [sic] session of the Commission on the Status of Women, which is also celebrating the twentieth anniversary of the Beijing Conference.

Cuba has scrupulously abided by the agreements adopted at the United Nations World Conferences on Women; and, consequently, its civil society organizations have supported the process of putting in to practice the measures that the government has been implementing, including the Plan of Action in Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference, held in Beijing, China, in 1995. Cuban women have been active participants in programmes, projects and social processes to promote the advancement and protection of women and girls; and unquestionable progress has been made in that regard.

Target No. 3 of the Millennium Development Goals, namely to "Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women", has been satisfactorily fulfilled; and there is recognition of the efforts made by the State and society as a whole in raising the profile of the role of women and empowering them, attaining higher indices of employment and education, greater satisfaction of their sexual and reproductive rights, and a universal guarantee of health and education services for women and girls throughout their life cycle.

Today there are over 900 million people in the world who are poor, 774 million who are illiterate and 57 million children who do not attend school, of

whom 54% are girls. Poverty gaps, both between rich and poor countries and within them, far from closing, have actually widened. Nonetheless, Cuba can modestly claim a very different reality in terms of the advancement of women, despite the adverse effects of the economic, financial, and trade blockade imposed for over 50 years on a small island by the government of the United States, seriously affecting daily life and families, through the application of measures and restrictions that confine the country's development. In this context, the advancement of women in Cuba is recognized not only in the Latin American and Caribbean region, but also worldwide.

Women constitute over 47% of Cuba's labour force in the state civil sector, and almost 25% of the self-employed; they represent a majority of professional and technical workers — 65.6% throughout the country, with special participation in the education (70.5%) and health (69.8%) sectors. They also account for 53.5% of researchers in the science and technology system. These figures are the results of universal and free education that is guaranteed by the State, bearing in mind that women constitute 64% of all university graduates, 70% of graduates in non-traditional sectors such as economic sciences, 74.7% in medical sciences, and 49.8% in natural sciences and mathematics. Of the country's 199 scientific research centres, 48 are led by women (24%).

These results have a favourable repercussion on the labour market, especially considering that women in Cuba receive equal pay for equal work, and the protection of their rights is guaranteed. Working mothers enjoy paid maternity leave, under legislation that was renewed in 2003 to extend the leave period to one year and allow for it to be shared between the mother and father. This progressive legislation is unique in the region; and although it has been taken advantage of less than expected, owing to the persistence of sexist stereotypes in society, it is without doubt a step towards achieving equality between men and women.

Cuban women play a leading role in the judiciary sector, providing 77.8% of prosecutors, 71.4% of presidents of provincial courts, and 71.3% of the country's professional judges. They have also gained increasing political empowerment with unquestionable achievements, as a result of a consistent and systematic policy that has enabled women to gain 48.86% of the seats in Cuba's Parliament, among the highest proportions anywhere in the world and the highest the Americas. Today, for the first time, the Council of State has two female vice presidents, and 42% of its members are women.

The Cuban United Nations Association supports and undertakes numerous activities with civil society organizations, most especially with the Federation of Cuban Women, an NGO in consultative status with ECOSOC, with a view to raising the profile of the role of women, promoting their daily activities in society and publicizing achievements.

The Association regularly undertakes activities to celebrate International Women's Days and the anniversaries of the Cuban Women's Federation, highlighting the work of women in various sectors, in celebration of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, and other specific activities to disseminate the achievements of Cuban women 20 years after the Beijing Conference.

The Cuban United Nations Association hopes that the results of this forty-ninth [sic] session of the Commission on the Status of Women, and in commemoration of the twentieth anniversary of the Beijing Conference, will respond to the interests of millions of women who see the United Nations as offering a space of consensus for progress and for agreeing on new measures to ensure the effective application of the Beijing Platform for Action, and universal ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

Twenty years on from the Beijing Conference, we call upon the international community to work — all of us together, states and civil society — with effective international cooperation and the fulfilment of Official Development Assistance, to implement national plans on behalf of women, to achieve equity and equality, and to eliminate violence in all of its forms, ranging from the economic to the psychological, from which millions of women suffer in the world today. May peace prevail rather than war, for a fair development that all people deserve, and fundamentally the women of all continents.
