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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 Dones per la Llibertat i Democràcia, 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

Dones per la Llibertat i Democràcia is a women's organization that was founded in Barcelona in 2001 and whose main work is inspired by the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations and by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It is also guided by the provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Its main objective is to help women to develop in freedom, in a democratic environment and with equal opportunities.

The year 2015 marks the twentieth anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, a document that was signed by 189 countries at the Fourth World Conference on Women. That United Nations conference was a watershed for women's rights given that it incorporates earlier treaties such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The Platform established 12 critical areas of concern in the fight for gender equality and highlighted the steps that were needed in order to remove the obstacles that prevent the advancement of women. While it is not a legally binding document, it serves as a policy guide for governments, institutions and NGOs. The Declaration recognizes that achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women are effective ways to combat poverty, hunger and disease and to stimulate truly sustainable development. The eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that stemmed from the Millennium Declaration, with their set deadlines and measurable indicators, have served as valuable reference points for monitoring and providing information on progress made and results achieved.

Almost 20 years since that conference, which, as captured by its theme, invited us to "look at the world through women's eyes", we can assess how the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action has been implemented and see how far we still are from fully achieving the objectives set out in 1995.

Despite the progress that has been made to date in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women, we wish to draw attention to the challenges and obstacles that still inhibit the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and of the outcome documents of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly.

In that respect, we undertake to call for the adoption of new measures to ensure their full and effective implementation, and stress the need to ensure that a gender perspective is integrated into the high-level plenary meeting of the General Assembly on accelerating progress towards the MDGs.

Over recent years, we have urged the United Nations system, international and regional organizations and all sectors of civil society, including NGOs, as well as every man and woman, to fully commit themselves and intensify their contributions to the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and of the outcome documents of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly.

Gender equality and the empowerment of women are fundamental development objectives and are an important way to achieve all of the MDGs. While Goals 3 and 5 concern specific gender issues, all of the goals have aspects that clearly relate to gender equality. Progress has been made, but it has been slow and uneven. That is why the need to continue strengthening the links between the

implementation of the Platform for Action and the attainment of the MDGs has repeatedly been highlighted.

It is essential that gender perspectives are set out and addressed more clearly in strategies designed to achieve all of the goals at national and local levels. Better mechanisms and tools also need to be introduced in order to ensure the accountability of States and other stakeholders with regard to the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women in all sectors.

Education plays a crucial role in the empowerment of women and girls. Good practices, such as the abolition of school fees, have made it possible to make strides in achieving the international goals of improving girls' access to education, particularly primary education. However, progress remains uneven across regions and between and within countries. Social, political and economic exclusion of women and girls is exacerbated by the inequalities of living environment faced by those that live in rural areas or in overcrowded districts. Structural barriers to economic, social, political and cultural life create and reinforce gender inequality and represent obstacles to the achievement of the MDGs for women and girls.

Secondary and higher education remain essential for offering more opportunities to women and girls. Non-formal education, including vocational training programmes, complements formal education in a major way.

As a result of economic difficulties and gender inequality across the world, women and girls are at most risk of dropping out of school, reducing the amount or quality of their food, rejecting medical treatment, turning to prostitution in order to survive and remaining in a disadvantaged position with regard to access to productive employment. More than half of the world's women are in vulnerable employment. Furthermore, the workload of family duties rests on women and girls, which limits the opportunities for women to receive an education or paid work.

The shortage of regulation and lack of equal access with respect to economic and financial resources, and the lack of access to social protection, education and training, are factors that combine to reinforce inequality and make women and girls poorer and more acutely affected by the global economic crisis of recent years, in addition to the lack of physical security of women and girls owing to disappearances, kidnappings and large-scale abuses in various areas of the world.

In the face of this situation, Dones per la Llibertat i la Democràcia proposes the following:

- States should incorporate the gender perspective into their social and economic policies, including development and poverty reduction strategies and related measures, and evaluate the degree to which policies, programmes and activities effectively address the needs, priorities and contributions of women and men, in order to ensure that the formulation and implementation of relevant strategies foster the economic empowerment of women;
- Specific policies and programmes should be developed and implemented in order to promote the economic empowerment of women, in particular by improving women's access to full and productive employment and decent work for all and by supporting the business skills and initiatives of women, so as to ensure the sustainable generation of sufficient income;

- Efforts should be made, as a priority, to identify and attempt to overcome unequal access for women to economic and financial resources, including employment, social security and productive resources such as land, property and natural resources, and appropriate credit and technology, and to study the possibility of adopting laws and implementing national policies that are more effective in that regard;
- Steps should be taken to improve the implementation of policies that have a bearing on the economic empowerment of women with regard to access to lifelong learning, the use of information and communication technology in adult education and vocational training programmes, and the eradication of illiteracy;
- More political will and leadership should be called for with regard to the adoption of resolutions that seek the implementation of measures necessary to achieve the post-2015 agenda more efficiently and quickly.

Unless the gender perspective is integrated into social and economic policies, success in achieving new development goals will remain out of reach for women and girls.
