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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 Global Alliance for Women’s Health, 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.



Statement

Since the convening of the International Conference on Population and Development (Cairo, 1994) and the Fourth World Conference on Women: Action for Equality, Development and Peace (Beijing, 1995), as well as the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in 1995, the health of women has assumed global significance as an issue of concern and a prerequisite for gender equality, sustainable development and peace and security. Together with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and such mechanisms as the Millennium Development Goals and the Global Strategy for Women's and Children's Health, the conferences and the declaration have spurred Governments into improving the health of women through the adoption of policies and innovative approaches and the enactment of legislation. These actions have mainly had an impact on the sexual and reproductive health of women, resulting in increased access to information and health services, the empowerment of women so that they can make decisions freely and take control of their sexual and reproductive health, the increased use of contraceptives, a reduction in the rates of maternal mortality and mother-to-child transmission of HIV and greater focus on the health of women living with HIV/AIDS.

Notwithstanding these developments, the overall health of women and girls continues to be a matter of grave concern. Inequalities and inadequacies in access to health care and other services still exist and many women are blatantly denied the fundamental right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. For example, women are at a greater risk of dying than men one year after a first heart attack, disproportionately suffer from malnutrition and endure severe complications from diabetes. The failure to fully address the biological and social differences between men and women, in risk analysis and disease management, contributes to the current health situation of women.

Because of their socially constructed gender roles as primary caregivers of children and as nurses in hospitals, women are at a higher risk of contracting infectious diseases, such as trachoma and multidrug-resistant tuberculosis. Similarly, the use of inefficient cook-stoves by women and girls in the preparation of meals for their families exposes them, as men and boys are not, to a plethora of respiratory and other health problems. In addition, women are less likely than men to receive medical treatment, owing to such factors as the lack of financial resources, the lower status assigned to them in many societies and the higher prioritization of the health of men and boys. Given the strong correlation between health and gender and sex, it is imperative that the health of women be addressed through this prism as a matter of urgency.

As a non-governmental organization dedicated to advancing women's health throughout their entire life cycle, the Global Alliance for Women's Health has been passionately working on the incorporation of these elements into global policy and development agendas. The success of efforts aimed at health promotion, education, advocacy and programme implementation has largely been achieved through collaboration with Governments, United Nations agencies, other non-governmental organizations, academia, the private sector and individuals. Since its formation in 1994, the Alliance has convened more than 100 symposiums on women's health in all regions of the world, covering such topics as diabetes and its impact on women, cervical cancer and human papilloma virus vaccines, increasing access to treatment

for women living with HIV/AIDS, coronary heart disease, multidrug-resistant tuberculosis, depression, osteoporosis and osteoarthritis, smoking and women's health, trachoma and non-communicable diseases.

The Alliance has also initiated campaigns and petitions, created donation programmes and international women's health networks, and published and distributed significant informational materials on women's health. Moreover, the efforts of the Alliance have facilitated collaborations between the public and private sectors that have led to advancements in women's health-care policies worldwide. During the fifty-eighth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, in 2014, the Alliance collaborated with the Permanent Missions of El Salvador and Malawi and the Virginia Lee Cook Foundation in hosting a successful symposium focused on the improvement of maternal health and entitled "Driving down maternal deaths through evidence-based policy and technology: anaemia, post-partum haemorrhage and digital medicine".

Increased access to Internet services and the use of mobile phones are important developments in closing the gap of unmet needs with regard to women's health. Many mothers and pregnant women access valuable information on healthy pregnancy, safe delivery and child care through the use of mobile phones. In this regard, the Alliance commends the World Health Organization and the International Telecommunication Union for assisting States in integrating information and communications technology into their health infrastructure and national health information systems.

The Alliance reaffirms its commitment to the full implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and all other mechanisms, including the much-anticipated sustainable development goals, aimed at the realization of gender equality and the empowerment of women. The Alliance nevertheless believes that the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women are negatively affected by the lack of consideration given to gender and sex dimensions in many of the areas of critical concern set out in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the persistence of negative gender stereotypes, various forms of discrimination against women and girls, including the early marriage of girl children and the less than optimistic global economic outlook.

The Alliance therefore calls upon Member States, United Nations entities, non-governmental organizations and the private sector:

- (a) To ensure that primary consideration is given to gender and sex in addressing all the areas of critical concern under the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the forthcoming sustainable development goals;
- (b) To take strong measures to integrate gender and sex into risk analysis, the management of treatments and data on outcomes, for all infectious and non-infectious diseases;
- (c) To implement all appropriate measures to eliminate the many remaining political, economic and social barriers that impede gender equality and the empowerment of women, including the early marriage of girl children, which are detrimental to their health;

(d) To exercise due diligence in addressing persistent gender stereotypes and cultural and religious beliefs and practices that threaten to reverse the gains made in the sexual and reproductive health of women;

(e) To invest greater financial and other resources, at the national and international levels, in the health of women throughout their life cycle;

(f) To promote the use of information and communications technology in meeting the health needs of women, such as the models presented in the joint report of the World Health Organization and the International Telecommunication Union entitled *eHealth and Innovation in Women's and Children's Health: A Baseline Review*;

(g) To strengthen the collection of gender-disaggregated data, especially in developing countries, on all health issues that affect women throughout their life cycle, in order to enable effective programme planning and implementation, which is critical to the effectiveness of the sustainable development goals.
