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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 House of Jacobs International, 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

Impact of the Beijing Declaration on the participation of African women in the development of their communities

God did not stop creating until woman manifested herself on the scene. No human society is complete without womenfolk. This is equally applicable to the nations of the world. The development of any human society could hardly be attainable if women's roles were not factored in, or acknowledged and appreciated. This is because women form about half of the world's population. It is also to be noted that any society that neglects such a large pool of human potential cannot achieve meaningful development. This reality was also articulated by Elochukwu Amucheazi in 1991 when he described African women in traditional society as hardworking and resourceful and noted that they are involved in decision-making institutions, politics and child education, and engaged in income-generating activities of various types, such as processing palm oil and garri, soap-making, weaving, sewing and pottery. In general, African women carry out significant proportions of the workload in food crop production, animal husbandry and food processing and distribution. They combine all those tasks with their traditional role of procreation and home management. Implicit in the above statement is the fact that women are an important resource for development. Judging from the contributions of rural women to the development of their communities, one could rightfully imagine that women are embodiments of national development. Development in this context has to do with the transformation of the entire society through the complete mobilization of every one of its members, irrespective of sex.

Opportunities for achieving gender equality and making gains over the past 20 years

Strengthening different dimensions of women's autonomy is needed to advance women's rights and gender equality.

The distorted, fragmented or limited implementation of different approaches these past 20 years has reinforced the point that policies, norms and strategies for women's empowerment must target at least the following goals:

- *Women's economic autonomy.* Not only stopping the feminization of poverty or working to eradicate poverty, but transforming macroeconomics and economic structures, building equality and social justice, and ensuring that women have access to and control of economic resources.
- *Women's political autonomy and full citizenship.* Working for parity of participation at all levels and ensuring women's participation across the broad spectrum of formal and informal decision-making institutions and arenas as a reality, and not just a quota aspiration; ensuring also that that participation contributes to advancing women's rights and that gender equality is considered central to building democracy and securing women's full citizenship.
- *Women's freedom from all forms of violence.* Whether perpetuated by State-sponsored actors, private actors or family members, violence remains one of the most pervasive barriers to women's full enjoyment of their rights. To be effective, any intervention needs to address violence and advance its eradication.

- *Women's sexual autonomy.* Women must have the freedom to make decisions about their sexual life without risking violence and discrimination. Even with all the knowledge and evidence of how sexuality is central to the lives of human beings, there is still limited recognition of the relevance of women's sexuality and of sexual rights in relation to all other spheres of development and human rights.
- *Women's reproductive autonomy.* Without reproductive freedom and the proper support for it (universal access to high-quality health services and the decriminalization of abortion), the full range of women's human rights cannot be advanced.
- *Women's innovative creativity.* Women are engaged in some of the most important innovations and creative interventions to advance women's rights and gender equality. There are numerous examples of the ways in which women's organizations and movements, from the grass-roots to the international levels, have been driving forces to advance women's empowerment around the world. All of this is being done with very limited resources and, in many cases, in very repressive conditions.
- *Establishing a strong, operational, well-resourced United Nations gender entity.* The proposed new United Nations gender entity is vital for advancing the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. The Commission on the Status of Women should make a strong recommendation to the General Assembly, which is currently in negotiations to concretize the creation of this entity. To ensure that the United Nations is properly equipped to play its role as a champion of women's rights around the world, the new gender entity should have:
 - *A strong operational capacity at the country level.* Even with the presence of other United Nations agencies and their important work, we need the new United Nations gender entity to have a strong operational capacity to support countries at the national level in advancing gender equality and women's rights.
 - *Significant financial resources and financial sustainability in the longer term.* The Global Gender Equality Architecture Reform Campaign recommends that the agency have an initial annual budget of at least \$1 billion.
 - *A leader with strong political stature, and a clearly demonstrated commitment and passion for women's rights and gender equality, selected through a transparent process and with clear criteria.* That person should be appointed this year.
 - *Clear mechanisms to ensure the meaningful participation of civil society, particularly women's organizations and movements, at all levels, including in its governance structure.*

Empowerment of women in the post-2015 United Nations development agenda

We need to make deeper inroads into the structures of society, the way in which it is organized and the way in which women are underrepresented.

Below are areas in which women do not have power but need to gain it. They could be used as a checklist for deciding how and whether our activities contribute to empowering women, as well as the different ways in which women's activities could be improved to empower women further.

Decision-making

Women should be able to participate in decision-making at all levels — in the family, the home, the church and the community.

Resources

Women should have better access to resources and greater opportunities to provide input on how money and government support are to be used for projects that they want.

Women should have better control over natural resources. They should have a say in the use of and decisions related to land and water supply, for example, especially where development projects have an adverse impact on people's lives, in particular on those of women.

Understanding society and the way it is organized

Women will not gain power and greater control over their lives if they do not know about the society they live in, its economic, social and political system, and the place of their country and the Pacific region in the wider world. Women need to understand the broader context in which their activities take place. To gain power, women need to have knowledge of:

- The political system, both traditional and introduced, and the place of the Pacific region in the wider world of international relations, in particular economic relations.
- Development choices made by Governments and how those affect men and women from the national level to the village level.
- Organizations and relationships (i.e. the ways things work, the structures and the system). At the village, personal and family levels, women need to learn to assess organizational structures, understand how they work and recognize the power relationships within them, even within their family (between brothers and sisters, husbands and wives and mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law). In other words, women need to understand the society that they live in, the system of government and the economy. There is a need to know more about the processes of government, who makes decisions and how, and who benefits from decisions made by those in power. Women will then be able to identify where privilege and power lie and to develop strategies for gaining greater access to resources and control over decisions that, directly or indirectly, affect their lives.

That knowledge and that understanding are part of the empowerment of women in the post-2015 development agenda. Women need to know these things to be able to work together and mobilize for change. A wider understanding of society, and of power and where it lies, would also enable women to identify other oppressed groups, which might also be joined in struggles for improving living conditions, wages, access to government, etc.