



## **Economic and Social Council**

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### **Commission on the Status of Women**

#### **Fifty-ninth session**

9-20 March 2015

**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 International Relations Students’ Association of McGill University, 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

The International Relations Students' Association of McGill University is a federally incorporated, not-for-profit organization based at McGill University, in Montreal, Canada. It is the only active, fully student-run organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council on the global stage. Since 2006, the Association has participated in meetings of the Commission on the Status of Women and consulted with permanent missions and other civil society organizations. The Association is an independent, autonomous student group that directly represents a diverse group of students at McGill. It is run independently of McGill, by full-time students who volunteer their time and effort to promote student engagement with global affairs, both within the university and in the local and international communities.

The Association aims to use the Commission on the Status of Women as a platform to link student experience and international diplomacy. It gives students the means to directly engage with global policy debates and leaders on a level unparalleled by any other student group. The Association offers the international community a unique youth perspective on the challenges and issues affecting gender equality today. It provides a direct, tangible connection to a diverse, politically aware student body that is not mediated by any type of Government or university oversight.

The 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action was a stepping stone towards the normalization and mainstreaming of gender-sensitive discourse. More specifically, it formalized and centralized specific goals for the advancement of women, including the education of girls and women; an increased role for girls and women in the promotion of peace and security; the promotion of the legal rights of girls and women; governance through the lens of gender; and increased action to end human rights abuses targeted at women. One of the most powerful norms established at the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995 was famously voiced there by Hillary Rodham Clinton, when she proclaimed that "human rights are women's rights and women's rights are human rights". Most importantly, the debate that took place at the Conference and the framework established by the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action still form the basis on which gender-related issues are being treated.

One of the strong points of the Commission on the Status of Women and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action is that gender-based issues are not treated in a vacuum. Rather, they are seen as being closely interlinked with development agendas and local and global well-being. This approach has yet to materialize in an appreciable way in many student and youth settings, in which gender-based issues, and feminism more specifically, are treated as stand-alone issues, limiting their appeal and importance for the general student population, and for young men in particular. We hope to foster interest in women's rights by linking them with such issues as economics and the division of labour, as well as education and development, that appeal to a broader portion of the population. Underlying this approach is a realization of the concrete benefits that a gender-sensitive approach can offer to policymaking.

Youth involvement is the key to implementing the ideas and policies initially developed in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. While we

acknowledge that youth are becoming formally involved with the Commission on the Status of Women, little is being done to bring their achievements and goals to the table with regard to gender equality. There is still much to be done to develop greater youth participation regarding this pressing issue.

It is important to sensitize a diverse group of students, as potential future leaders, to gender issues, and to mainstream the focus on the norms established by the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. It is the global community's responsibility to ensure a strong foundation of gender sensitivity among youth to ensure the orientation of global policies towards the principles espoused by the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

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