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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 IOGT 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

In its more than 160-year long history of service to communities around the world, gender equality and women's empowerment have been a crucial focus for IOGT International. It is this perspective and this understanding that make our organization both hopeful and concerned. We are hopeful because we have seen considerable progress and considerable achievements in gender equality and women's empowerment. We are concerned because we also face major challenges, not only to the advances made but also to the health and well-being of women and girls in general.

Twenty years ago, the global community came together and Governments expressed their determination to advance the goals of equality, development and peace for all women everywhere in the interest of all humanity, but while progress has been made, the potential for sustainable and transformative change has largely been untapped.

Current challenges that affect the implementation of the Platform for Action, as well as opportunities for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women in the post-2015 development agenda, are three global epidemics: non-communicable diseases, HIV and AIDS, and gender-based violence.

These three global epidemics are disproportionately burdening women and girls, especially women from low- and middle-income countries, and they have one common and dangerous risk factor: alcohol consumption.

Alcohol is one of four major risk factors in the global epidemic of non-communicable diseases. Non-communicable diseases are the leading cause of death worldwide. A staggering 35 million people die every year from non-communicable diseases, of which 18 million are women. Non-communicable diseases represent the biggest threat to women's health worldwide and are having an increasing impact on women in their most productive years in developing countries.

Alcohol is a risk factor in the global epidemic that is gender-based violence. Every third woman is subjected to violence at least once during her lifetime. In some parts of the world, gender-based violence is related to alcohol abuse in up to 80 per cent of cases. Alcohol marketing that sexualizes and dehumanizes women also plays an inexcusable role in perpetuating a culture of objectification of women.

Alcohol is also a risk factor in the transmission of HIV because it increases the likelihood of engaging in risky sexual behaviour, such as unprotected sex, a frequent change of partners or violent sex. Alcohol weakens the immune system, making the organism more susceptible to HIV, and it makes adherence to medication regimens for people who are HIV-positive more problematic. Women are disproportionately burdened by many aspects of the HIV epidemic.

This brief look at the most basic evidence shows that these three epidemics deal a triple blow to women's equality and empowerment in the twenty-first century. As more and more girls and women benefit from advances in gender equality and equal opportunity, these strides are being jeopardized.

IOGT International notes the decision made by the global community 20 years ago to take all necessary measures to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and the girl child and remove obstacles to gender equality, as well as its

determination to advance the goals of equality, development and peace for all women everywhere.

Today, we know better than ever before that alcohol is an obstacle to the achievement of these important goals. Alcohol-related harm reaches deep into the lives of women all over the world.

It is with this in mind that we wish to encourage the world's Governments to apply the tools of a high-impact and cost-effective alcohol policy in common efforts for the advancement and empowerment of women. Alcohol policy measures, such as the three "best buys" principle of alcohol policy described by the World Bank, the World Economic Forum and the World Health Organization, among others, are crucial tools for the achievement of the goals outlined in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

The women and girls of our world, who are faced with these epidemics, which burden them disproportionately, and who have been exposed to oppression for centuries, deserve more than anyone that the global community resolve to employ all evidence-based tools at its disposal to facilitate transformative and sustainable change. Alcohol policy measures can help bring that change for women and girls.
