



## 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 American Association of University Women, 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 American Association of University Women supports the fifty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women and the assessment and review of the implementation of the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which clearly recognizes women's rights as human rights, including their right to make their own decisions about reproduction and sexuality and to be protected from all forms of violence, including rape. The documents also recognize the rights of the girl child.

We applaud specifically the acknowledgement by the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action of the need for immediate and concerted action by all to create a peaceful, just and humane world on the basis of human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the principle of equality for all people of all ages and from all walks of life. We also applaud its recognition that broad-based and sustained economic growth in the context of sustainable development is necessary to sustain social development and social justice. As women's rights activist Bella Abzug declared, imperfect though it may be, the Beijing Platform for Action is the strongest statement of consensus on women's equality, empowerment and justice ever produced by Governments.

The American Association of University Women, a non-partisan, non-profit organization, has more than 170,000 members and supporters across the United States and abroad, as well as more than 1,000 local branches and 800 college and university partners. As it stated in its 2013-2015 public policy programme, the Association believes that global interdependence requires national and international policies against human trafficking and that promote peace, justice, human rights, sustainable development and mutual security for all people.

We also affirm the conclusions agreed at the fifty-eighth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, specifically to promote equal opportunities and the full and equal participation of women and men as agents and beneficiaries of people-centred sustainable development, and we reaffirm that the eradication of poverty on the basis of sustained economic growth, social development, environmental protection and social justice requires the involvement of women in economic and social development.

The 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action affirmed that Member States have a duty to provide women with equal rights, and numerous nations subsequently revised or created constitutions and laws to meet the sovereign responsibility to advance gender equality. Unfortunately, the challenge has been the overwhelmingly large gap that exists between legislation and its implementation.

We urge policymakers and Member States to review, in 2015, the commitments made in Beijing and their importance as societal issues of critical importance to all nations. Such issues are significant for the economic growth, progress and political stability of all countries. Women make up half the world's population, and without gender equality, we cannot create a world that supports the political, economic, social and cultural human rights of all people. The Association supports the ongoing incorporation of gender mainstreaming in the post-2015 sustainable development agenda.

Despite the commitments of nations to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the lack of political will has affected advancement, and critical gaps in aspects of women's human rights remain across all sectors.

The Association firmly believes that to ensure full empowerment and equality for women and girls, the post-2015 sustainable development agenda must include the following vital elements. We urge Member States:

- To establish and implement national and international policies against human trafficking, and that promote peace, justice, human rights, sustainable development and mutual security for all people.
- To increase women's political leadership and participation in national parliaments and other decision-making bodies to provide a greater voice for women, and to better address their needs.
- To enact and enforce legislative safeguards to prevent violence against women and girls, which is increasing worldwide.
- To decrease the gender digital divide and improve the access of women and girls to information and communications technology. Access to technology is the key to women's economic empowerment because it enables them to access online education, career opportunities, health information and e-commerce
- To acknowledge and engage the rising voices and collaboration of men in the fight to empower women. Men possess the political and economic power in society to alleviate practices that discriminate against women.

An important focus of the research and advocacy of the Association is eliminating the gender wage gap. We affirm, as noted in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, that "women are key contributors to the economy and to combating poverty through both remunerated and unremunerated work at home, in the community and in the workplace. Growing numbers of women have achieved economic independence through gainful employment."

The lack of workplace equality, however, including equal pay, advancement opportunities and freedom from discrimination, continues to hinder the economic advancement of women globally. Widening pay gaps have also added to concerns about inequality and economic instability. Women still perform the majority of "second-shift" housekeeping and caregiving tasks. Such responsibilities may limit their capacity to fully pursue career and employment opportunities, and place an undue burden on their actual and perceived advancement capabilities. The pay gap affects women from all backgrounds, at all ages and at all levels of educational achievement, although earnings and the pay gap vary, depending on a woman's individual situation. Women remain the majority of the world's individuals living in poverty, even though the proportion of the world's poor has decreased.

The Association's widely acclaimed research reports, entitled "The simple truth about the gender pay gap" and "Graduating to a pay gap", succinctly address the pay gap in the United States, its effect on women of all ages, races and education levels and the steps employers can take to close it. As more women have entered the workforce and families are relying increasingly on women's wages, equal pay has become a family issue, not just a "women's issue." For working mothers, the gender pay gap can contribute to poor living conditions, poor nutrition and fewer opportunities for their children. Governments and employers must ensure

that women throughout the world, in different sectors, industries and capacities, performing thousands of different jobs each day, can achieve equal pay.

The Association continues to advocate for strong pay equity legislation, regulation and enforcement to protect employees and assist employers. The Association also educates the public about the persistent gender pay gap and its effect on working families. Such efforts are critical elements in our work to close the gender pay gap and make “equal pay for equal work” a reality. The gender pay gap is a complex problem that requires a multi-layered solution.

The resolution of these issues, as well as unequal access to and management of natural resources, the impact of armed conflict, women’s role in peace and security and the rights of the girl child, is integral to achieving gender equality and women’s empowerment across all sectors in the post-2015 sustainable development agenda. Economic, political and social development will not be realized without the full development and human rights of all women and girls.

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