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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 Women in Europe for a Common Future, 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.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Women in Europe for a Common Future's overall goal is to achieve an equitable and sustainable future. Therefore, within our work — environmental implementation and advocacy work — we focus on gender equity. “Women's rights are human rights” states para. 14 of the Beijing Declaration of 1995; this ensures the perpetuation of the principle of “equality and non-discrimination” — core elements of the human rights framework — for “vulnerable” and/or “marginalised” groups within society. Groups who already face inequality within society due to, for example, inhibiting gender stereotypes and roles and gender-based discrimination suffer even more by the impacts of environmental degradation. Existing social inequalities, in particular poverty, are exacerbated by e.g., climate change impacts. The review of 20 years Beijing, the Declaration and the Platform for Action, provides the Women in Europe for a Common Future — recognised e.g. by the German national Beijing report and the national report of the Netherlands for this work — with a good opportunity to highlight major concerns and challenges that are still remaining when analysing chapter K (“Women and the Environment”) of the Beijing Platform for Action.

The strategic objective 1 of chapter K of the Beijing Platform for Action is to “involve women actively in environmental decision-making at all levels”. This is still far from being achieved. Research shows that an average of about 30 per cent of women participated in international environmental delegations over the period from 2008-2012 and an average of 19 per cent of women headed these delegations (Environment and Gender Index, p. 58). Furthermore, at the national level existing stereotypes and various traditional gender roles still hamper women's participation in decision-making processes.

We therefore call for the engagement of women as part of delegations to international environmental negotiations. Decision 36/CP.7 “Improving the participation of women in the representation of Parties in bodies established under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change or the Kyoto Protocol” is not sufficient. Women's and girls' concerns and needs have to be heard and taken into consideration.

Engagement at local levels also has to be encouraged as it has provided an important entry point for women to drive and lead solutions to sustainable development. The Women in Europe for a Common Future's work in cooperation with local partners in Kyrgyzstan shows the following: the consideration of women's needs has made a difference to the lives of the rural population in relation to safe drinking water and safe sanitation. Women and girls have had to carry water from large distances to their homes. Bad sanitation facilities not only at home, but also within schools resulted in girls often not attending classes. Within established Community Based Drinking Water Users' Unions women learned how to voice their concerns and priorities, took over responsibilities and shaped the management of water and sanitation of their local community.

The strategic objective 2 of chapter K of the Beijing Platform for Action is to “integrate gender concerns and perspectives in policies and programmes for sustainable development”. The complexity of linkages between rights, social dimensions and sustainable development is a challenge and has so far not been addressed adequately in multilateral environmental agreements. The sustainable

development agenda and the development of related legislation, policies and programmes often lack attention to the social dimension, including a gender-sensitive understanding of human rights. The Millennium Development Goals faced much criticism due to their compartmentalised approach to issues, such as gender equality and environmental sustainability which are by nature cross-cutting issues. The Agreed Conclusions of the 58th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women in 2014 summarised in para. 37: “progress on the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls has been limited owing to the lack of systematic gender mainstreaming and integration of a gender perspective in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the Goals.”

In Tajikistan, project work showed how complex the realization of a single right, such as the right to land, natural and productive resources for women can be. Land cannot be “owned” in a legal sense in Tajikistan and therefore, it cannot be transferred or inherited. But the right also depends on many other factors: due to existing poverty rates and the growing impacts of climate change, in particular on the natural resource of water, women in rural Tajikistan have to fight hard to secure their and their dependents livelihood. Additionally, traditional and religious practices hinder women to enjoy equal rights and foster patriarchal patterns discriminating women and girls. The resurgence of patriarchal attitudes is of particular concern. Legal illiteracy and the missing awareness of their rights and the related issues are also a reason for the difficult situation of women.

We therefore call for a comprehensive gender mainstreaming approach within policy making at the international as well as the national level. Furthermore, we call for effective means to translate gender equality legislation into proper and effective implementation.

The strategic objective 3 of chapter K of the Beijing Platform for Action is to “strengthen or establish mechanisms at the national, regional and international levels to assess the impact of development and environmental policies on women”.

The aim of one of the Women in Europe for a Common Future’s projects “Empower Women — Benefit (for) All” funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands is to contribute to the economic and political empowerment of women from low-income rural and peri-urban regions in six developing countries. Empowerment of women means capacity-building and leadership for economic and political development. Therefore, technical assistance for women is crucial. Small-scale technical solutions are often more sustainable (e.g. energy efficient solutions) and can be easily promoted via women on the household level.

We therefore call for better capacity-building of and training for women. We also advocate for the establishment of a governance framework allowing for proper gender-sensitive impact assessments. The framework has to incorporate accountability, ex-ante assessment and criteria (such as having demonstrated sustainable development results), transparent reporting, independent evaluation, and monitoring mechanisms.