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to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly  
entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and  
peace for the twenty-first century”**

### **Statement submitted by Equidad de Género: Ciudadanía, Trabajo y Familia, 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.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

### **We are missing women and girls' human rights for a sustainable development process**

Due to the sexual division of labour, women have been left out of one of the greatest inventions of humanity: the state, itself. In this regard the struggle for gender equality is fundamental: women have been fighting to be acknowledged as citizens, as subjects of rights, by the very same entity that denies them their status as individuals. The state, as we know it, is made up of a plurality of systems of laws, regulations, public policies, institutions, formal and informal practices, customs, and privileges, among other elements. They all mirror the underlying discrimination patterns that shape our societies. Hence the difficulty to achieve structural change.

Individuals, communities and even nations have a narrow space of autonomy when confronted with the structural obstacles of a globalised world. The dream of sustainable development is thus challenged by the same dynamics that generated inequalities and depleted the planet in the first place. Agenda 2030 states fulfilling the agenda is the responsibility of the countries themselves. However, some obstacles can only be addressed in a multilateral way. This is the case of illicit economic flows from the Global South to the Global North, which surpasses ten times the amount of Official Development Assistance received. Inequalities exacerbate the North-South dynamic and systemic issues within the financial and economic global structures pose obstacles to national policy that cannot be solved by governments without a strong multilateral system. Such a system would guarantee an unbreakable link to the human rights framework and the full recognition of women's human rights. All these examples are a sign of current times: we need to find collective and systemic solutions, and cannot assume that the individual level is enough to ensure the transformational shift that is needed to achieve sustainable development.

The same applies to the terms in which Agenda 2030 was agreed. Goal five addresses the need to achieve gender equality and women and girls' empowerment. However, there is no mention of women and girls' human rights. It is expected that without the reinforcement and the full guarantee of these rights, gender equality will be achieved. That is far from being possible. Target 5.4 reads: "Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies, and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate". By recognizing and valuing the importance of unpaid domestic and care work without reducing and redistributing it, the target risks narrowing the ambitious article addressing the macroeconomic dimension that the Beijing Platform for Action ensured in Strategic objective A.1: "Review, adopt and maintain macroeconomic policies and development strategies that address the needs and efforts of women in poverty". In this strategic objective the macroeconomic dimension is acknowledged in depth: "Analyse, from a gender perspective, policies and programmes — including those related to macroeconomic stability, structural adjustment, external debt problems, taxation, investments, employment, markets and all relevant sectors of the economy — with respect to their impact on poverty, on inequality and particularly on women; (...)". The burden of unpaid domestic and care work has

proven to be the underlying obstacle for women and girls to exercise their rights, while at the same time is rooted in the discriminatory foundation of gender roles and the sexual division of labour.

It is important to emphasize that we cannot have a model of sustainable development that is subsidised by the unpaid work performed by women. The lack of recognition and fulfilment of women and girls' human rights will endanger the achievement of the sustainable development goals as well as the mitigation and adaptation processes on climate change impacts. Without the proper recognition of women and girls' human rights, we are left to wonder: sustainable development for whom?

Evidently, the harshest impacts of this model will fall on those women who suffer the intersection of multiple discriminations and those who are furthest from the frameworks of the state, such as: migrant women, indigenous women, rural women, women with disabilities, older women, poor women, and women whose gender identity and sexual orientation challenge the current discriminatory paradigms of legal and programmatic frames. It has to be stated clearly that "women's empowerment" is not enough to achieve gender equality. In a world in which women are not acknowledged as citizens, and therefore their needs and interests challenge state structures, women's lives are constantly threatened. Criminalizing abortion and bodily autonomy, by prosecuting women environmentalist and women human rights defenders, or by conditioning women's access to land titling and therefore endangering their well-being leading to forced migration and displacement, the threat is constant in every corner of the world. That is to say, the individual level is not enough when facing a state that does not take charge of its obligations to fulfil human rights for every person across the lifespan and of all conditions of human diversity.

Even those women who are supposedly closer to the roof of the States, those inhabitants of cities, are still marginalized. The term "citizenship" derives from "cities". But urban women cannot be further away from the recognition of their status as subjects of rights. In the year 2030, it is expected that 80 per cent of the global population will live in an urban settlement. And while it poses a huge challenge in terms of a generalized problem, it should also be stated that women face the harshest conditions. Infrastructure, water and sanitation and transportation systems are ignorant to the needs, interests and rights of women of all ages. Their safety, integrity, and freedom are jeopardized in every urban space.

In the face of those big challenges, feminist and women's organizations have shown a technical expertise and the knowledge needed to optimize the efforts required towards a truly sustainable development model. They are under-resourced, and yet they are a powerful and progressive positive force that strengthens existing measures. Their role in leading towards a transformational shift cannot be understated.

And while women of all ages are thus undermined in the recognition of their rights, a new trend is menacing to worsen their precarious conditions: the 2030 Agenda and Financing for Development platforms promote a dangerous motion to deregulate the actions of global corporations. So while States are reluctant to acknowledge women as full citizens, entities whose aim is profiting from their actions are granted extraterritorial allowances that expand the negative social and environmental impacts of global corporations.

Thus, we make the following four recommendations:

- To urgently recognize and guarantee the fulfilment of women and girls' human rights.
- To urgently reduce and redistribute unpaid domestic and care work between states, private sector, communities, families, women and men.
- To sufficiently fund and strengthen feminist and women's organizations, with the recognition that they play a central role in a transformational shift for sustainable development.
- To systematically promote the design of legal and programmatic frameworks to ensure gender equality and the fulfilment of women's human rights. This has to be translated to an effective implementation of differentiated actions addressing the specific needs of women of all ages and of all human conditions.

Structural solutions require the recognition that a collective and systemic approach is urgently required. Whether for transitioning towards climate justice, a world with multilateral governance, (with accountability of the private sector on their social and environmental impacts), or a new relation between the Global South and the Global North, transformational aims require the same pre-condition: meaningful transformation cannot be achieved when the half of the population that currently face the biggest challenges of humanity with the lowest resources to face them. Gender equality, women's rights and a human rights framework are needed now more than ever. Women and girls' human rights must be a priority and are a crucial condition on a path towards sustainable development.

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