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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 Center for Women’s Global Leadership,
Education International, International Federation of Business and
Professional Women, International Federation of University Women,
Soroptimist International, Virginia Gildersleeve International Fund
and Zonta International, non-governmental organizations 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's educational empowerment and its link to sustainable development

The International Federation of University Women and the undersigned, call for governments and policy makers to realise girl's and women's empowerment through access to lifelong education, this is key to achieving sustainable development. Gender equality in education reduces poverty, boosts job opportunities and fosters sustainable development for all. The International Federation of University Women calls for states and policy makers worldwide to take action on the unique challenges affecting girls and enable them to fulfil their potential by removing barriers to their education at all levels. The International Federation of University Women strongly emphasises the critical timing of action following adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals at the United Nations General Assembly to ensure that the measures agreed will be implemented on the ground at local and international level.

The International Federation of University Women sees safe access to, and completion of, quality secondary education as a critical means to provide girls and young women with the tools and skills necessary to progress further in higher education, work and society. Girl's and women's education must transition beyond primary level to be able to hold positions of status and influence in their communities, places of work and through all institutions in order to make lasting inroads into breaking the cycle of poverty: only 60 girls for 100 boys are completing their secondary education. Engagement in higher education is critical for the advancement of knowledge needed for sustainable development and for the preparation of current and next generations to put that knowledge to use across all aspects of their work and lives.

Girls' and women's ability to take part in decision-making as leaders within society is a crucial element in enabling nation's economic growth and political stability. Their participation must come from a position of integral social respect and this often means overcoming entrenched cultural and social norms that prevent them from accessing education at the secondary level and beyond. It must be recognised that discriminatory social norms are a fundamental barrier to women's ability to enjoy their human and socioeconomic rights, including education up to the highest levels. With gender-based violence in educational settings widely recognised as a key barrier to girls' education, we are encouraged to note the Sustainable Development Goals targets specifically addressing discriminatory institutions such as early marriage, unequal inheritance and land rights, and gender-based violence. Traditional barriers to girls advancement must be broken down with an emphasis that in families girls' and boys' education assumes equal importance.

A specific Sustainable Development Goal for gender (Goal #5) is highly beneficial in mobilising action and resources, however gender equality needs to be accounted for in every aspect of the Sustainable Development Goals. This needs to be capitalised upon when ensuring that legislative actions come into place at grassroots level. Addressing discriminatory social norms and institutions has become a new development priority and is strongly embedded across the Sustainable Development Goals 5 targets. Yet, this area needs much more statistical work and investment, including disaggregated data collection.

The International Federation of University Women welcomes Global Goal target 5.3: to eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation. Existing legislation to protect and promote girls human rights including Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriage must also be implemented fully. The International Federation of University Women is cognisant of the fact that early marriage is now viewed as a form of abuse of human rights, and is twice as prevalent for girls than for boys. Early marriage and the physical danger this can result in for women include a high maternal and child mortality rate, increased fragility of the family financial situation and perpetuating a cycle of poverty. Violence against women is an ongoing issue and one which has been increasingly acknowledged as intolerable in all its forms. The right of women to free movement has been limited by various regimes as a way of social control, limiting their ability to access knowledge and influence. In addition limiting women's access to health, education and the right to association can only have negative effects on the economic development of their societies. Violence against women continues to evolve into continually more socially destructive ways and to have ever more far-reaching consequences. This must not be allowed to erode the advances that legislation has made.

We urge member states to:

- Invest a minimum 6 per cent of GDP in education, to support and enhance the provision of quality education that is truly accessible to all, irrespective of socioeconomic status, and to ensure quality training of teachers and adequate resources. Investment in teachers is an essential part of sustainable development. For education systems to have resilience, to be able to adapt to growing populations and changing vocational and educational needs, teachers need to receive excellent pre-service training, in-service support and continued professional development and skills updating. To retain experienced and trained education staff their salaries should be at a competitive level with similar professions, adjusted in line with inflation and regularly reviewed. Teachers hold unique positions of influence as a channel of communication between children and their parents and as agents of change within society. As such their status needs to be recognised.
- Facilitate enhanced cooperation among schools, communities and authorities in efforts to promote access to quality education at all levels. To ensure consistency of approach multi-stakeholder partnerships must be formed between universities, education departments, ministries of education and gender. Within individual school operations, teacher-training and other institutions of higher education need to collaborate to share resources and skills.
- Provide informal education where necessary as a means to achieve sustainable development amongst isolated and vulnerable groups. Educational approaches must be made more flexible and participatory for indigenous peoples. The education of indigenous women and girls as the most vulnerable of these groups must be accommodated with sensitivity. They must also be valued for their traditional knowledge base and respect for the environment including sustainable living and agricultural practices; therefore the process of education

needs to incorporate alternative approaches, must maintain dignity, include the participation of indigenous peoples, especially girls and women, in policy and decision-making processes, and be a two-way exchange of information.

- Take action to gather and integrate gender disaggregated data as an essential element of sustainable development. Data demonstrates and emphasises how formal and informal laws, practices and attitudes shape women's ability to enjoy their rights and take advantage of empowerment opportunities. The Millennium Development Goals went some way to draw attention to the fact that women and girls suffer a disproportionate amount of poverty related disadvantages. This must be built upon with the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.
- Address gender pay gaps through appropriately administered channels including through collective bargaining. Inequality between men's and women's salaries for performing the same work with the same qualifications is unacceptable as is the high proportion of women in the informal sector. The lack of employment law protection and the resulting financial vulnerability must be addressed for women to be able to contribute to and benefit from a properly regulated work environment. Unequal sharing of unpaid work between women and men can exacerbate gender wage gaps.
- Establish mechanisms and resources to monitor institutions at local, national and international levels to ensure accountability of all stakeholders in their responsibility to uphold for women and girls equal education access, human rights and gender equality.

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