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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and 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 Alliance Defending Freedom, Centro de Estudio y Formacion Integral de la Mujer, Mujer para la Mujer, Observatorio Regional para la Mujer de América Latina y el Caribe, Red Mujeres, Desarrollo, Justicia y Paz and Vida y Familia de Guadalajara, 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

Alliance Defending Freedom is a not-for-profit international legal alliance of more than 2,400 lawyers dedicated to the protection of fundamental human rights. We have been involved in over 500 cases before national and international forums, including the supreme courts of Argentina, Honduras, India, Mexico, Peru and the United States of America, as well as the Inter-American Court of Human Rights and the European Court of Human Rights. In addition, we have provided expert testimony before several parliaments in Europe, the European Parliament and the United States Congress. We have accreditation with the Economic and Social Council, as well as the Organization of American States, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the European Union.

Observatorio Regional para la Mujer de América Latina y el Caribe is a Mexican non-governmental organization that highlights the value of women in the professional, social and family spheres through the compilation of information, the exchange of better practices, and promotion of men and women's development.

Vida y Familia de Guadalajara is a private Mexican welfare institution that cares for socioeconomically vulnerable pregnant women and helps them achieve post-natal social integration through education and skill-building.

Mujer para la Mujer is a non-governmental organization that works to promote the fundamental human rights of women, with a focus on improving the lives of rural women of the various indigenous communities in Mexico.

Centro de Estudio y Formación Integral de la Mujer promotes respect for values that strengthen the dignity of women, mainly through educational initiatives in Mexico and the United States.

Red Mujeres, Desarrollo, Justicia y Paz works in twenty-eight states in Mexico and serves to empower women through trainings in business and finance to more effectively contribute to their families, communities, and country.

We call upon Member States at the sixty-first session of the Commission on the Status of Women to prioritize the human rights of women by focusing in particular on the promotion of women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work. This can only be done by examining this said changing world, including its challenges and opportunities for women, and removing obstacles to the realization to the full enjoyment by women of all economic, social, cultural, and political rights. When women are empowered through equal access to education and full rights at work and in all other walks of life, the whole of society benefits as a result of faster-growing economies, healthier families, a better-educated populace, and many other positive consequences.

Paragraph 39 of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action states that "the girl child of today is the woman of tomorrow." The breakdown of the natural family and the increasing promotion of abortion as a so-called human right, therefore, are grave threats to the economic empowerment of women.

According to Article 23(1) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society, and the Preamble to the Convention on the Rights of the Child defines it as being "the

natural environment for the growth and well-being of all its members and particularly children” and that “for the full and harmonious development of his or her personality, [the child] should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding.” In the context of increasing numbers of women at work, States must honour their obligations to support and protect the family and to ensure that family units and the relationships between their individual members do not suffer by way of decreased maternal contact. This may take the form of guaranteeing social support for mothers in the workforce, potentially in the form of paid maternity leave, so as to ensure that their family lives do not need to suffer in favour of their professional lives. The eliminating of the need on the part of women to place a choice to work over their families will aid in the social and psychological development of their children, including their daughters, which in turn will give girls and young women the best start possible for their futures, working or otherwise. Furthermore, even in light of a changing world of work and increased rates of female workforce participation, women should not be encouraged to feel or believe that prioritizing their families and children above work is a lesser choice or less honourable walk of life, or that full-time participation in the workforce is an obligation or an end in and of itself, and State policy should reflect this.

Paragraph 38 of the Platform for Action acknowledges that “throughout their entire life cycle, women’s daily existence and long-term aspirations are restricted by discriminatory, unjust social and economic structures, and a lack of resources in most countries that prevent their full and equal participation.” Real change is needed in order to realize the full empowerment of women, especially in parts of the world in which they are denied access to the full range of economic, social, cultural, and political rights guaranteed to them under international law. Such change must not, however, include the promotion of so-called “human rights” not enshrined in international law which are nevertheless aggressively promoted by a number of United Nations agencies and Member States in ways which do not enjoy pan-global consensus. In order for the full empowerment of women to be fully realized, the right to life under Article 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights must be unconditionally respected, particularly the right to life of the unborn, including unborn baby girls. Abortion is not a fundamental human right under binding international law, and its liberalization in no way empowers women, least of all the pre-born female killed as a result of it. Where the death penalty is legal, Article 6(5) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights forbids the execution of pregnant women, which can only be logically justified on the grounds of a need to protect innocent unborn human life. Beyond simply outlawing abortion, however, States must root out the negative economic and social incentives that motivate women to seek it out in the first place. The aforementioned social support for pregnant women and new mothers may play an important role in this.

A specific example of discrimination against women beginning at the earliest stages of life cited by paragraph 38 of the Platform for Action is the practice of “prenatal sex selection.” When abortions are procured for sex-selective reasons, as has become common practice in a number of Member States in which the lives of boys are valued more highly than those of girls, troubling political and economic ramifications follow. The lower the number of women in society, the fewer women there are to contribute to political deliberation and economic growth by way of

working in both the public and private sectors. Imbalances between male and female populations also has serious effects on the fertility and birth rates of nations, leading to ageing populations, depleted workforces, and economic recession stemming from demographic decline. As long as abortion is legal generally and any parents prefer male children, sex-selective abortions will be impossible to stop entirely.

In conclusion, this changing world of work has seen dramatic shifts in the demographics of the workforce across the globe. While the rights of women to work and the rights of women inside of the workplace must be respected, States must not forget their fundamental obligations under international law to promote and protect the family as the natural and fundamental group unit of society, as well as the protection of the right to life of all human beings, including those not yet born and especially those pre-born women whose rights in this respect are disproportionately violated in numerous parts of the world. The full empowerment of women and girls, including those in utero, must be achieved with full respect of all internationally recognized human rights and in accordance with all international obligations.
