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entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and
peace for the twenty-first century”**

Statement submitted by League of Women Voters of the United States, 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

Restoring Civil Discourse – Partnerships at the UN

If it is true that “words do matter” and we know that harassment begets threats and threats begets violence, it is obvious that in this new order of polarized societies, we are losing our human rights. The League of Women Voters of the United States through its 400,000 members and activists is working every day to bring the civility back into politics. We know the statistics – one out of three women and girls will face violence at some point in her life. Human slavery is measured at 40.3 million by the International Labour Organization, including the forced marriage of 15.4 million individuals every year. Hatred and violent acts against communities including Jews, Muslims, all sexual identities, the disabled, refugees, and against individuals through domestic violence or by trusted leaders from religious or government institutions – are condemned but then forgotten. When politicians, media and human rights activists try to work within the system to change the dynamics, they in turn are harassed, threatened and exposed to violence. So how do we change the paradigm?

First, we need to understand that “we” can change the paradigm. In democratic societies, candidates use polarizing techniques such as lying, harassing and bullying because it works in undermining the opponents’ campaigns. Voters need to understand when the lying, harassing and bullying is occurring so the voter can make an informed decision about which candidate to vote for. Voters need to be able to access the polls and have their vote count without manipulation.

Civic education and civil discourse are at the very core of the League of Women Voters of the United States’ work. An active and informed citizenry is the foundation of a well-functioning democracy, and the League of Women Voters of the United States devotes much of its activity to ensuring that citizens have access to the information, skills, and resources to play an active role in their government including voting, serving on government boards and agencies, ensuring that the laws are implemented and defending laws when government fails to do so. In the hyper-partisan political climate that we live in, the non-partisan work of the League of Women Voters of the United States, to get out the vote, feels more important than ever. The League of Women Voters of the United States has been at the forefront of litigation before federal courts, including the United States Supreme Court challenging gerrymandered maps, the citizenship question on the 2020 Census and voter suppression across the country. Through its hundreds of chapters across the United States, the League of Women Voters of the United States are registering more than 2,000,000 new voters for the 2020 elections, reached 10 million voters in 2018 with information about candidates (Vote411.org, candidate forums and debates) and activating more than 400,000 members and supporters to get out the vote, prevent voter suppression and fraud to enable citizens to make informed decisions in casting their precious votes.

Secondly, once a candidate is in office, citizens need to recognize that our constituent work does not stop. Good laws that promote human rights for all, including enhanced protection for women and girls, need to be created and implemented. At the United Nations, we know that the vast majority of member states have passed conventions, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The General Assembly was unanimous in its passing of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Yet, we also know that far too many states have lagged behind in the implementation of these legal instruments.

The League of Women Voters of the United States' advocacy work throughout the United States includes recognizing that, despite its failure to ratify the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the United States still has legal instruments that can be used to ensure women's equal rights. The League of Women Voters of the United States has and continues to work with other civic organizations in promoting Cities for CEDAW, recently passing new resolutions in South Carolina and Illinois. Further, we work with local governments to create governmental agencies, including Commissions on the Status of Women, that implement programs to promote women's and girls' human rights to economic empowerment, healthcare and reaching her full potential in a safe environment. Further, we are working with partners to promote that women have a legal right to human rights on a national level as well by advocating for the Equal Rights Amendment passage.

It should be noted that study, research and consensus are the underlying tenets of everything that the League of Women Voters of the United States does, whether at the United Nations or throughout the United States. We work with partners to share best practices and solutions to issues affecting women's political and economic leadership and empowerment, preventing gender violence, especially in the area of human trafficking and girls' rights. Our most recent endeavours included a partnership with the Inter Parliamentary Union on violence against women politicians in which Members of Parliaments from Mexico, Iceland and Kenya shared best practices and solutions. The violence against women politicians panel was held at the United States House of Representatives in September 2019 and thus far has reached more than 2,000 viewers on social media. Additionally, a partnership with Trinidad and Tobago, Fiji, Albania, Canada, UN Women, Inter Parliamentary Union, and five non-governmental organizations led to a side event at the Commission on the Status of Women discussing why it is so important to reach parity of women in national governments and to inspire the audience to work towards that goal.

With access to Member States, United Nations Economic and Social Council accredited non-governmental organizations can and do work cooperatively by organizing forums and educating and/or advocating for adherence and implementation of these legal instruments. Yet, we can and must do more. We have an opportunity to use new technologies to expand our work to those that cannot come to New York by using livestreaming and video for the sharing of best practices on priorities of common concern. We can use videoconferencing for sharing of experiences in the field and ideas for improvement that need to be communicated with member states via our advocacy work with member states at the United Nations and at the capitol level. And we can use social media to expand our messages when it is clear that governments are not living up to the promise of Beijing. Most importantly, through our networks, we can bring the experiences in the field and share those experiences with member states in advocating for necessary change in improving human rights. We can bring the work of the United Nations to the field when we share the research and best practices on issues that are of mutual importance.

The League of Women Voters of the United States continues to reach out to partners within the United Nations community, be it member states, United Nations agencies and/or non-governmental organizations accredited with the United Nations Economic and Social Council to "think globally, act locally". We look forward to making new partnerships as a result of the efforts to commemorate the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in helping to promote women's political and economic leadership and empowerment, preventing violence against women and girls, climate sustainability and universal healthcare.