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Statement submitted by IOGT International, 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

IOGT International, on behalf of our 137 member organizations from 56 countries, welcomes the opportunity to submit this written statement to the sixty-fourth session of the Commission on the Status of Women.

The IOGT International is the premier global network for promoting development through alcohol prevention and control. Our members work from a human rights-based approach with all aspects of alcohol-related harm: protecting the rights of children from families with alcohol problems; protecting the rights of women and girls suffering from alcohol-related gender-based violence; and exposing and counter-acting the unethical practices of the alcohol industry, including alcohol marketing that sexualizes and objectifies women and perpetuates harmful norms of male dominance.

One of the major obstacles to gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls everywhere is alcohol-fueled gender-based violence. In fact, it is a problem of epidemic proportions.

There is a strong relationship between alcohol and domestic abuse, intimate partner violence, and sexual assault. The relation between violence and alcohol use is enormous and unequivocal, according to the World Health Organization (WHO). Evidence shows:

- 65 per cent of women experiencing intimate partner violence in India, Vietnam, Uganda, Zimbabwe, and South Africa reported the perpetrator had used alcohol.
- In Argentina, 68 per cent of all cases of domestic violence are alcohol-related.

Beyond the strong link between alcohol use and gender-based violence, there is also a clear connection between alcohol marketing and harmful gender norms. The alcohol industry has amassed a vast case library of alcohol ads, commercials, and other alcohol promotions that perpetuate discriminatory images, attitudes, and norms about women and girls and their role in society.

- The portrayal of men, as well as women and girls in alcohol marketing, fuels harmful masculinity norms.
- The sexualization, objectification, and de-humanization of women in alcohol marketing undermines gender equality and women empowerment. It amplifies the common belief of masculine superiority over females and justifies male demonstration of power over the females.

Strong evidence of the link between alcohol use and violent behavior means that cultural and social norms around alcohol use and its expected effects also encourage and justify violent acts.

Twenty-five years after the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action, and more than four years into the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, we are deeply concerned about the lack of recognition of the link between alcohol and harmful gender norms as well as violence against women.

For example, focus groups in rural Rwanda show that women who are victims of domestic violence rank alcohol as the number one factor. Nevertheless, the voices and stories of affected women and girls from communities around the world have not received attention commensurate with the burden of the problem.

In addition to the strong link between alcohol use and gender-based violence, and the clear connection between alcohol marketing and harmful gender norms, there is also the fact that alcohol jeopardizes reproductive health and rights.

Alcohol use has detrimental effects on the health of women and girls:

- Alcohol consumption increases the risk of unintended pregnancies, through its contribution to unprotected sex.
- Alcohol use during pregnancy is also a risk factor for adverse pregnancy outcomes.

These are three dimensions of how alcohol hinders progress towards Sustainable Development Goal 5: Gender Equality and threatens gender equality and women empowerment. For progress to be possible, recognition of the problem is essential. I call on all feminists to pay attention to women and girls in communities around the world and to consider the unmistakable evidence of alcohol's burden on female emancipation.

Seen with the eyes of women and girls, the world we live in has an alcohol problem. But solutions are available. For instance, the WHO global plan of action on interpersonal violence, in particular against women and girls, identifies "ease of access to alcohol" as a risk factor for the occurrence of gender-based violence.

The alcohol policy best buys in general have been shown to hold significant potential in protecting women from gender-based violence. Higher alcohol prices, through increased alcohol taxation and less alcohol availability, are effective measures to prevent and reduce violence against women. In addition, banning or regulating alcohol promotion, advertising, and sponsorship helps end harmful norms and other destructive outcomes.

Simply put, alcohol policy is a feminist issue.

IOGT International calls on Member States, the United Nations System, and the wider women's rights movement to renew and increase efforts to make alcohol policy the priority it should be in our joint fight for women's human rights, gender equality, and female empowerment.
