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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 Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation, 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.



Ensuring the prosperity of women and girls in a changing world

Since the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, much progress has been made around the world towards mainstreaming gender equality in achieving sustainable development. Amplified by the Sustainable Development Goals in 2015, the journey towards closing the gap on gender inequality, from poverty reduction and improvement of gender parity in education and vocational training to increased participation of women in decision-making processes, has seen a wealth of progress. However, socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, and many other emerging issues continue to hold back women from realizing their basic and fundamental human rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Working to alleviate the suffering of those in need since 1966, Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation, founded by a Buddhist nun and 30 housewives, upholds the beliefs of equality and equity between all sentient beings, regardless of their gender, social status, race, nationalities, and ages, through its work in sustainable development in 100 countries. Tzu Chi aligns itself with the strategic objectives and actions of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and calls upon all stakeholders to strengthen the protection of women in catastrophes and vulnerable situations.

Women, especially female heads of households, single mothers, women with disabilities, elder women, and girls, are more vulnerable to the extreme impacts of natural disasters, catastrophes, and other emergency situations. However, women also play a key role in community resilience and recovery and disaster risk reduction, which can outweigh their vulnerabilities to disasters. In Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation's disaster management strategies and frameworks, strong participation from women is seen, starting from the planning stage to implementation phase. Tzu Chi believes that women are the agents of change and are the primary actors who can plan and deliver their own development. During Tzu Chi's humanitarian response plan, after cyclone Idai in Mozambique, women have shown strong leadership skills, as well as empowerment through the action of reuniting the communities to build resilience, respond and recover, and further mitigation and adaptation planning. Acknowledging that the women and girls are at greater risk of exploitation while they are displaced, Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation ensures the prioritization of women and girls in its disaster response operations, which include the provision of basic items, access to basic healthcare, empowerment and leadership training, and life skills education to uphold the dignity and safety of women and girls while they are at most vulnerable state. Through mainstreaming gender factors in organizational policy and programme planning, and by giving women and girls their needs, women impacted by disaster survive and thrive, which allows them to contribute to economic, social, and environmental sustainability, resilience, and development. We call upon all actors to ensure the equitable distribution of resources, power, and decision-making at all levels to all women and girls, regardless of their socioeconomic status, and to strengthen policy frameworks to ensure that all women and girls are empowered, capacitated, and gained their power to become leaders and actors.

Close the gender gap in the access to education, vocational training, and healthcare

Among the world's refugee population, more than 80 per cent is comprised of women and girls, who are often more easily exposed to different kinds of exploitation and violations of basic human rights, including limited or no access to food, water, education, and healthcare. To achieve gender equality, no one should be left behind, especially the women and girls with the status of refugees and displaced persons, as these populations are often extremely vulnerable. Access to basic human rights is fundamental for women to stand equally with men in the context of sharing the same resources and achieving the same prosperity. Removing the barriers to closing gender

gaps in accessing rights and resources have to be the main priority of all decision makers and implementers. Education is key for the future of the young generation. However, refugee children – mostly girls – are often absent from school for myriad reasons. For identifying and removing barriers faced by girl refugee children, including lack of access, violations of children’s rights, family burdens, and inadequate social systems, Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation implements comprehensive gender-focused approaches to improve enrollment rates and the socioeconomic position of Syrian and Rohingya girl refugee children in Turkey and Malaysia, respectively. More needs to be done to include those who are left behind to ensure the achievement of gender equality in the spectrum of sustainable development. We call upon the decision makers and other stakeholders to develop a more comprehensive, inclusive, and human-centered strategies for ensuring universal access to health care, education, and social services for all women and girls.

Recognize the role of women in safeguarding the environment

Acknowledging that women and girls are often the most disproportionately affected by climate change, Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation volunteers actively engage women and girls in disaster risk reduction efforts, recognizing that the solutions that are needed for women to adapt to the changing climate has to come from women. Often taking the lead in promoting environmental protection practices and lifestyle, women are key stakeholders in the implementation of environmental protection, including playing the various roles of consumers, producers, educators, and caretakers of the family. When given access to decision-making spaces, women are able to drive changes in the community towards more sustainable practices. Recognizing that many environments, particularly rural communities, are deeply vulnerable to the climate risks that have already been locked in, Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation calls upon all stakeholders to support women’s environmental sustainability initiatives and ensure full participation of women in planning, monitoring, implementing, and reviewing processes of climate adaptation and mitigation plans at all levels. To live in harmony with mother earth is vital for sustainable development, and we cannot live in harmony if 50 per cent of the population is left behind.

We call upon the Commission on the Status of Women to recognize and strengthen existing commitments made through the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. We look forward to the agreed-upon conclusions of the sixty-fourth session of the Commission on the Status of Women in reflecting the diverse perspectives of all actors endeavoring to help women and girls flourish in this changing world.