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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 National Alliance of Women’s Organizations, 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

This is a pivotal moment. For all those committed to advancing the cause of gender equality 2020 provides a number of key anniversaries that provide us with opportunities to analysis the past, define gains and gaps, verbalise aspirations and make giant leaps of faith towards a better future. It is 25 years since the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, 20 years since United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, 10 years since the formation of UN Women and 5 years since States Parties unanimously agreed 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

The Commission on the Status of Women is the largest United Nations gathering on gender equality and is striking in the number and diversity of events to attend. The array of human diversity is heart-warming and wrenching, from the colour of national costumes seen, to the stories of courage and sacrifice heard.

Event after event highlights the suffering that women around the world have experienced in all walks of life, every culture and country. Since 1995 there have been advancements for women and girls, and these need to be highlighted and celebrated, yet their lived experience still remain that of a disadvantaged minority. If a system prevails that makes us work so hard for gains only to be vulnerable to losing them by one shift in policy or change of politician, surely our focus needs to be on creating a system that cannot be so easily manipulated by self-interest and fear.

Perhaps it is timely for all protagonists at the sixty-fourth session of the Commission on the Status of Women to ask ourselves how we can reshape our conversations. Should we continue to focus on perpetuating a system that has so often failed us, or can we use our energy, time and resources to create a new world order with equality for all.

There are many conversations that need to be re-thought or re-directed. One example might be those around the concept of power. Is power a limited resource which must be taken by one group from another? Does not this zero-sum conception of power encourage reticence by some to give it away to those who do not have it? Is there not another view of power – as a limitless resource that we can channel to enact great things in the world? What about the power of thought, of knowledge, of love, of compassion? If we expand our thoughts about the power of our own agency will that not also expand conceptions of governance and authority? When we shift the definitions of power, this also affects that of empowerment – a word used so often in the discourse on equality.

The lack of implementation of numerous international instruments, with hard fought language striving for equality for women and girls, with noble words but not much action, has led to the feminist movement concentrating on rage, hope and action for 2020. We note a profound sense of frustration and despair that despite the best efforts of so many, we are still so far from “The Future We Want, the UN We Need”. And yet women and men across the globe have a powerful hope that this Commission on the Status of Women will make a difference, that this year will see significant moves forward towards equality. To achieve this; to achieve the implementation of the 12 critical areas of concern and the 17 Sustainable Development Goal; to ensure “no one is left behind”, action is required. We ask States Parties to take positive action to ensure that the sixty-fifth session of the Commission on the Status of Women celebrates a year full of equality gains, where the rhetoric is matched to the lived reality of the women and girls of the world.

At this juncture, at such a critical moment, we ask States Parties and United Nations agencies to work with civil society to reconceptualise the elements of the

mandate for the Commission on the Status of Women as we consider the themes for forthcoming sessions. If we are to monitor, review and appraise progress achieved and problems encountered in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action at all levels, and to advise the Council thereon, the voices of civil society must be heard and resources provided for robust participation.

We ask States Parties to strengthen and develop the catalytic role of the Commission on the Status of Women in mainstreaming a gender perspective in United Nations activities, including this in future themes and taking forward the working methods resolution from the fifty-ninth session.

United Nations system-wide coordination in regard to women and girls still needs to be improved and the Commission could be used more effectively to assist the Council in its coordination function. We ask States Parties to work with civil society to provide examples of best practice and challenges. Experts and activists from around the world participate every year, yet there is scant effort to make the most of this resource at the session. They can provide valuable insights.

The fifty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women reiterated the mandate to identify emerging issues, trends and new approaches to issues affecting the equality of women and men, especially in light of 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Some issues remain invisible such as widows. We ask States Parties to raise the profile of widows and use the Commission on the Status of Women to highlight the importance of this demographic and the current situation of widows worldwide.

If a person asked at random in the street about the Commission on the Status of Women, they would probably be unaware of its existence. Yet its mandate includes the aim to maintain and enhance public awareness and support for the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Year on year the Commission on the Status of Women has made scant progress in this regard. We ask States Parties to support further resources for United Nations agencies to work with civil society to raise the profile of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the 12 critical areas of concern.

If 2020 is to be a year of positive change and given that many of the systems and structures of society have been designed to reinforce domination and inequality, significant resources must be channelled towards learning about effective models of governance, education, and economics. We ask States Parties to work with civil society so that the full participation of all people is harnessed in creating the world anew with new patterns of life that will allow all people to thrive. This must include the structures of the United Nations.

The hashtag for 2020 is “feminists want system change”. We ask all stakeholders in the Commission on the Status of Women to join with us in asking, “if humanity is to progress what are the principles that need to be highlighted?” We suggest society should be structured on the principles that women and men are equal, and that the true power of the individual and institutions can be released through cooperation and reciprocity. We ask that we work for the sixty-fourth session of the Commission on the Status of Women to be the one where these values of cooperation and reciprocity are fully implemented with enhanced space for civil society to participate more fully than ever before.

This statement is endorsed by:

HelpAge International

International Federation of Business and Professional Women

Mother’s Union

National Board of Catholic Women of England and Wales

Soroptimist International Great Britain and Ireland (SIGBI) Limited

United Kingdom Association for the United Nations Development Fund
for Women

Wales Assembly of Women

Widows Rights International
