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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 Mediators Beyond Borders, 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

On the occasion of the sixty-fourth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, Mediators Beyond Borders wishes to highlight that while progress has been made on the objectives of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action over the last 25 years, persistent gender inequality remains a deterrent to sustainable peace and just societies. To achieve gender equality by 2030, women's effective leadership and participation in peacebuilding, negotiation, and decision-making is essential. In addition, access to dispute-resolution options that recognize and support women as agents of change, self-determination and as full and effective members of justice, law, and human rights are concurrent pathways to achieving Goal 5 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Mediators Beyond Borders is a non-governmental organization of people building peace.

On the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, Mediators Beyond Borders wishes to highlight that nations, civil society, and citizens must reflect on the progress that has been made, identify new and emerging threats to achievement of the declaration goals, and eradicate continuing gender-discriminatory practices. Amid incremental progress, troubling new trends challenge the progression of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. For example, in some jurisdictions, laws that protect women's rights (such as those pertaining to reproductive health options) are now being challenged in the name of conservative views and political gain. In other jurisdictions, progress has been unacceptably slow – women still do not have the right to self-determination, property, and decision-making. “Nearly 20 years after the adoption of the Platform for Action, no country has achieved equality for women and girls and significant levels of inequality between women and men persist. Critical areas of insufficient progress include access to decent work and closing the gender pay gap; rebalancing of the care workload; ending violence against women; reducing maternal mortality and realizing sexual and reproductive health and rights; and participation in power and decision-making at all levels (United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action Beijing+5 Political Declaration and Outcome*, 2014).”

Mediators Beyond Borders believes women's equal representation in leadership, political, and community roles is a powerful antidote to insufficient or recessive progression of human and gender rights. According to the World Economic Forum's 2018 Global Gender Gap Index, the largest gender disparity is in regard to political empowerment, with a gap of 77.1 per cent. The economic participation and opportunity gap is the second-largest at 41.9 per cent. According the same report, across the 149 countries assessed, there are only 17 that currently have women as heads of state, and on average, only 18 per cent of ministers and 24 per cent of parliamentarians globally are women. Similarly, women hold only 34 per cent of managerial positions across the countries where data is available, and less than 7 per cent in the four worst-performing countries (Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Yemen and Pakistan). Mediators Beyond Borders believes that building skills and competences in conflict resolution, peacebuilding, and negotiation lays a foundation for improving political and economic gender gaps and engaging women. In addition, investment in women's leadership and negotiation skills propel positive change by building skills that last for life and apply to many contexts. This premise forms the foundation for Mediators Beyond Borders's Women in Mediation Action Group and our International Training Institute, which empowers women by providing support, mentorship, and training in negotiation and conflict resolution. In doing so, the basis is for increased participation by women in leadership, political, and economic forums

can be developed. The goal of the International Training Institute is to develop the knowledge and tools that trainees require to: advance their ability to reduce intra- and inter- community conflict; develop community safety and family health; lead conflict resolution and transformation processes in their countries; develop connections with other women peacebuilders locally, regionally, and internationally; and to contribute to peace negotiations locally, regionally, and internationally. These programmes align with the strategic objectives of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, including Strategic Objective E. Women and armed conflict, and Strategic Objective E.4: Promote women's contribution to fostering a culture of peace, which calls for peaceful conflict resolution and peace, reconciliation, and tolerance through education, training, community actions, and youth exchange programmes, in particular for young women.

The United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 and the Women, Peace and Security Agenda recognize that women and children are disproportionately affected by violent conflict and forced displacement; yet, peace efforts including Track 1 and 2 mediations are mostly led by men. Interests of women and children cannot be articulated and addressed without effective participation of women in mediation efforts and process design. Women need equity in quality services such as health, housing, and education to repair the impact of violence and rebuild communities and economies for a more sustainable peace after conflict. Yet again, women continue to remain fundamentally obscured and excluded from peace activities and dialogues. Peace processes and negotiations have long been considered within the purview of international engagement, including diplomatic efforts at multiple levels. Yet, women still have a minimal role in negotiations.

Grassroot investment in women such as those provided by the International Training Institute is not enough. In order to address the gender gap, nations must address the underlying systemic gender discrimination as it relates to societal norms and statutory legal frameworks that deter women's independence and economic prosperity. Such gender discrimination may exist by lack of national or regional laws that do not protect women's special interests, or by institutional or governmental policies that poorly address issues of pay equity, affordable childcare and maternity leave benefits, and equal opportunity. Private sector plays an important role in the development and investment of women and girls in science, technology, engineering, and math, an area where women continue to be underrepresented from opportunity and advancement opportunities.

Mediators Beyond Borders provides the following recommendations to the sixty-fourth session of the Commission of the Status of Women:

1. Propel the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals by investing in the training and development of women peacebuilders and negotiators.
2. Encourage nations to mirror the initiatives of Iceland in making unequal pay for women illegal.
3. Promote women's empowerment by calling for the development of statutory initiatives that support a woman's ability to invest in her profession, such as debt support and financial investment, childcare subsidies, and self-determined maternity leave.
4. Increase resources, from advocacy to capital, to provide a way for women to be involved in peace processes and recognize women as human rights defenders who bring resolution and peace to communities affected by conflict.
5. Given that women's roles in conflict vary across different communities, consider the full spectrum of those roles as imperative for peace efforts. Negotiators, mediators, and peacekeepers should therefore frame peacemaking strategies to reflect

a more holistic approach to women's roles in conflict. All peace and security strategies require a gender lens, and need to assess gender-based differences and responses to conflict in a way that reflects those differences.
