



## **Economic and Social Council**

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### **Commission on the Status of Women**

**Sixty-fourth session**

9–20 March 2020

**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 Peacebuilding Solutions, 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.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

### **Gender Equality Post-Disaster – Local Agency, Participation, and Sustainable Development: Background**

Global development endeavours to improve the lives of vulnerable populations through interventions and programs designed to create opportunities for social, economic, and political advancement. Forced migration, caused by protracted scenarios such as a natural disaster or extended conflict, create displaced populations whose needs must be addressed by the international community. Whether it is rebuilding a community after a natural disaster or building a clinic in a rural village, international partners engage in collective action to protect and support susceptible groups. However, in our zeal to fix problems and implement solutions, the voices of those we serve are often lost.

Refugees and internally displaced persons represent a highly marginalized group who are exposed to increased instances of violence and discrimination. Furthermore, due to the destabilizing of basic goods, services, and infrastructure, this population faces more obstacles including access to medical interventions, education, and economic development. The constant disruption to daily life means that recovery efforts are delayed or never reach fruition. Women and girls, in particular, are then further marginalized, becoming even more at risk for exploitation and abuse to obtain the goods and services needed. And yet, they are often removed from the conversation between communities and development/aid personnel. According to our research, women and girls are denied access to or involvement in the decision-making processes regarding rebuilding communities. If we are to continue in the fight for the empowerment of women and girls then their voices must be included, in their entirety and variation.

Peacebuilding Solutions is an international organization that places emphasis on local voices, local knowledge, and local agency when designing programs and interventions. By integrating community voices into community action, by taking into account their unique histories and structures, we strive to amplify and support the needs of displaced populations through active listening and strategic planning.

Peacebuilding Solutions emphatically supports the sixty fourth session of the Commission on the Status of Women; the review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty third special session of the General Assembly, and its contribution towards the full realization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

We recognize the efforts of the Commission on the Status of Women in making significant progress towards gender equality and sustainable development. We equally appreciate the Commission on the Status of Women's sustained and inclusive engagement with the non-government organization community to identify ways to improve best practices and encourage gender equality.

We reaffirm the principles, policies, and suggestions of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) which highlights the need to recognize the voices of all women in every capacity. While the rights of women and girls have advanced over the years, there are still challenges that hinder the full social, political, and economic empowerment of women and girls. Moreover, gender equality within the framework of sustainable development provides a lens for understanding community structures, gender politics, and gender roles. In turn, that information can be used to deliver highly tailored programming that is organic and germane to the target community based on lived experience and knowledge.

We share the view that there is a need to accelerate the realization of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls, everywhere. We acknowledge that the success of this will be determined by concrete improvements in the lives of refugees and host communities. We call on the United Nations and other organizations to transform the international community's approach to protection, assistance and sustainable solutions for refugees as well as displaced persons. The Commission on the Status of Women must, therefore, strive to be realistic but also develop a collective ambition, framework, and activities that are cohesive and inclusive.

### **Local Agency, Participation, and Sustainable Development**

The Commission on the Status of Women's commitment to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action framework is reassuring. However, a commitment to policy needs to translate into practice, to be woven into the overall activities of global development especially during the decision-making process. Indeed, involving women and girls throughout the various phases of development begins with creating safe spaces for the expression of ideas. Additionally, active participation is the key to sustainable development.

In sustainable development activities, women are active participants in the rebuilding of communities. However, their contributions are far too often overlooked and dismissed by larger discourse. Organizational timelines and work plans hinder organic ideas. Organizations need to remove their notions of progress and integrate local systems of knowledge into account.

We recognize efforts to align the Commission on the Status of Women with the Sustainable Development Goals as well as ongoing United Nations reforms in prevention, peacebuilding, and development, among others. In essence, the "leave no one behind" aspirations of the Sustainable Development Goals will succeed only if refugees and displaced persons are included in national as well as international development plans. At the same time, the Commission on the Status of Women must acknowledge that sustainable development and principles will not always line up with community strategies. Again, the voices of women and girls must be amplified so there are no missed opportunities.

Engaging women and girls as key stakeholders encourage more holistic solutions and drives innovation in terms of products and services available for the population. Women's and girls' lives will be empowered more easily and more durably through their inclusion in community decisions. Long-term financial investments should be presented in the form of grants as we remain concerned that additional development funds will mainly be provided in the form of loans.

The Commission on the Status of Women's call to a range of stakeholders to work together, including local authorities, civil society, and displaced persons, is welcome. However, we must make it clearer how meaningful participation and leadership of people with lived refugee experience must be included.

Explicit inclusion of women-led and community-based organizations must also be made standard in development programming and implementation. Their participation should not only be limited to implementation however, but they must be actively involved in policymaking and planning processes as full partners and as subject matter experts. Moreover, these organizations along with development institutions must be empowered so that they can manage gender equality holistically, effectively, efficiently, and sustainably.

The process of working together towards a common public good should be based on a culture of partnerships rather than a mechanism of support or advice. The principles of partnership serve to establish equal, transparent, results-oriented,

responsible and complementary relationships and should be referenced in gender equality and women's empowerment work. This should be applied both within communities and amongst organizations.

Finally, to conclude, we would like to emphasize that only by including women and girls throughout the development process, can we make space for them as active agents in their recovery. In the fight for gender equality, the focus should remain on the contributions of women and girls without the additional marginalization of other groups. Therefore, Peacebuilding Solutions is calling on all organizations to join us in elevating the voices of displaced women and girls for they are the key to rebuilding.

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