



## Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General  
15 December 2019

English only

---

### 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 Association of Presbyterian Women of  
Aoteaora (New Zealand), Commission of the Churches on  
International Affairs of the World Council of Churches, Lutheran  
World Federation, Presbyterian Church USA, The Salvation  
Army, United Church of Christ Board for World Ministries,  
United Methodist Women, and World Federation of Methodist and  
Uniting Church Women, non-governmental organizations 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

Ecumenical Women was founded in 2000 on the occasion of the five-year review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action to enhance and reinforce the collaboration of progressive churches and ecumenical organizations to advocate for women's rights at the annual United Nations Commission on the Status of Women. We believe that the church is a powerful transformative vehicle for the teaching, protection, and enforcement of women's rights and gender equality.

On the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and our twentieth year of advocacy, education, training, network building, and solidarity, our international coalition is highlighting significant advances and ongoing work of our 16 member organizations as we strive for fundamental system change in church and state to invest in and empower women worldwide.

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action has influenced women's participation in power structures and decision-making within Ecumenical Women's member organizations, including high-level leadership positions within churches, as executive directors of various mission agencies, and the intentional investment in organizational delegations to the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women and other United Nations conferences.

In the 25 years since the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the successes have been both qualitative and quantitative. Some members have gained non-governmental organization special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, thereby having a voice at the United Nations. There is an overall increase in women's participation at all levels of organizations. Our members highlight an increase in the number of regions where women are permitted to serve, in the positions women may now exercise their ministry, and in the number of women being ordained to multiple orders of ministry (e.g., deacons, priests, pastors, elders, bishops, and more).

While we celebrate the overall movement towards equality within the broader faith-based community, we acknowledge the ongoing work and some challenges. These include parts of the church that continue to discriminate against women in church leadership and continuing discrepancies in pay and benefits. Issues of human sexuality remain controversial and divisive within several member organizations. Increasingly, as the global political landscape has shown growing challenges to gender equality and women's rights, the church (as a microcosm of society) has felt the negative impact.

The members of Ecumenical Women, as a unique part of a global community that is grounded in faith and committed to justice, affirms God's preferential option for the marginalized and that Jesus has confirmed God's will that the world "may have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:10). We envision a human community where the participation of each and every one is valued; where no one is excluded on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender, age, ability, or religion; and where full diversity is celebrated as God's gift to the world.

Advocacy remains a priority for the constituent members of Ecumenical Women. We celebrate that the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action mirrors a wide variety of work in social justice, mission, and outreach that the church is undertaking, with member organizations working towards the common goals with local, regional, and national governments, as well as with Member State missions at the United Nations.

Some of the ways in which the spirit of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action is witnessed in our faithful action include identifying gender as a priority

theme of our work at the United Nations and in international church governance, involvement in the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, and the Commission on the Status of Women, as well as dedicated staff positions and programmes. Our ways of working include: prayer and liturgical resources; education; training; advocacy; solidarity efforts; creative engagement; and in some cases, our members have been among the few religious voices to acknowledge women's moral agency in justice issues.

Our programmes seek to improve life for all in areas including: substance use disorder; racial equity and intercultural ministries; relief and development work; indigenous relations; decolonization and reconciliation initiatives; eco-justice initiatives; environment; creative action to address the climate crisis; anti-poverty projects; financial literacy; job and skills training; health care; reproductive health rights; intentional inclusion of people of all gender identities; food security and food sovereignty; anti-human trafficking efforts; and actions to eliminate gender-based violence and violence against women. This work is augmented by the intentional recognition that gender justice intersects with other aspects of justice work, including all of the Sustainable Development Goals.

While we acknowledge local discrepancies, women are represented in all levels of leadership within Ecumenical Women membership, lay and ordained. There are parts of the world where barriers exist for women, in society and in the church, but the overall trend since 1995 is an increase of women's church leadership. Some members are now including non-binary, transgender, and gender-variant identification in their collection of gender data.

The members of Ecumenical Women support a spirit of collaboration, working with faith partners and civil society organizations to continue seeking out root causes of injustice and work for strategic and systemic changes. We aspire to increase our advocacy and networking, at the Commission on the Status of Women and beyond, and to provide the maximum support in leadership development and mentoring. Around the world, the church is at the heart of community and civil society, and as such we share a distinct voice. Women's role as speakers of truth and justice workers are grounded in our deep-rooted history and tradition. Inspired by our ancestors, empowered by our sisters and brothers, and filled with hope for generations yet to come, we recommit ourselves to the work of faithful and transformative advocacy, at the United Nations and at home.

---