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Statement submitted by United Cities and Local Governments, 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

Global problems and local solutions

As the United Nations assessment on gender equality demonstrates, strong efforts are required to achieve institutional and policy frameworks that ensure gender equality. Beyond gender mainstreaming, this involves sexual and reproductive health and rights, preventing and combatting violence against women, social and labour protection, and quality education.

As public institutions closest to our communities, we – local and regional governments – are crucial actors in the implementation of relevant policies. We also play a central role in the setting up of strategic partnerships for the achievement of the main critical goals foreseen by the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in particular Sustainable Development Goal 5: gender equality.

Local governments for gender equality in the world

We, mayors, local and regional elected representatives, and our associations believe that gender equality and the empowerment of women are both a goal of and a tool for the sustainable development of all communities across the world, as laid out in Sustainable Development Goal 5: gender equality in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Furthermore, we observe that the problems and challenges facing humanity, although global, have to be dealt with at the local level. These challenges affect vulnerable populations, especially women and girls. To achieve gender equality, we need sustainable, equal, and democratic local governments that give women and men equal access to decision-making and services and treat them equally.

In addition, we demand a renewed and powerful commitment to gender equality. Local and regional governments' efforts towards achieving gender equality in regard to ensuring equal access to public spaces and positions are frequently overlooked in the international context. However, regional governments and their contributions to gender equity are pivotal to achieving Sustainable Development Goal 5: gender equality and the aims of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

We, therefore, call for the sixty fourth session of the Commission on the Status of Women to provide a deeper understanding of the role of local and regional governments in gender equality to fuel a wider strategic approach to the implementation of the goals set out in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including Sustainable Development Goal 5: gender equality, and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action by:

- Implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Local governments, being the nearest institutional-level government bodies to the populations, are crucial for the achievement of main critical areas foreseen by the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action: poverty, education and training, health, violence, armed conflict, economy, power and decision-making, institutional mechanism, human rights, media, environment, and the girl child.
- Leading the way. A large number of experiences, policies, and actions towards the achievement of gender equality can be found locally. Beyond advocating for gender equality, local governments need to act as models of best practices for communities.

- Being at the frontline. Local governments are best placed to tackle violence and harmful practices against women in the public and private spheres. Local policing and urban planning, particularly the creation and maintenance of public spaces, are essential tools in tackling violence against women. Local governments have an important role to play in identifying women and girls affected by violence and providing them with the support and services to escape it and rebuild their lives.
- Building capacities. Local and regional governments have a duty to ensure women's equal access to opportunities, land, and economic and natural resources. Local authorities can establish mechanisms to make it easier for women to obtain basic legal documents, provide legal aid services that support women in exercising their rights, and guarantee women's participation in land governance institutions and policy-making processes. The enhancement of capacity-building programmes and city-to-city cooperation initiatives demonstrates how international cooperation and peer-learning are crucial for the advancement of gender equality at the local level and in the world.
- Enhancing gender equality in local decision-making. In its 2019 progress report Sustainable Development Goal 5: gender equity, the United Nations underlined that women continue to be significantly underrepresented in leadership positions at all levels of government in most countries of the world. Local governments must act to improve female representation in elected, administrative, and appointed offices at the highest levels of our own institutions. This can be achieved through a combination of anti-discrimination and positive action measures, and by additional support through mentoring schemes, flexible working conditions, and affordable childcare provisions.
- Monitoring the condition of women. Despite the clear gap in women representation in local institutions worldwide, precise data do not exist. It is crucial to collect data, which is a main objective of United Cities and Local Governments' gender equality strategy. The collection of sex-disaggregated data can produce a qualitative change by developing monitoring and gender indicators capable of informing further initiatives, actions, and programmes towards the full achievement of gender equality.
- The role of local governments' international and national associations. International and national associations of local and regional governments play a crucial role by implementing special programs and projects and promoting special actions aimed at achieving gender mainstreaming and equality. United Cities and Local Government, through its regional sections and Standing Committee on Gender Equality, works to facilitate the exchanges of information and experiences across the world.