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entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and
peace for the twenty-first century”**

Statement submitted by International Alliance of Women, 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

Progressing with our feminist goals through alternative narratives that will allow us to fight effectively against women's human rights violations

Today it is 25 years since the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action was adopted. The Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing took place at a moment of great global optimism when a new world order of cooperation was emerging after the end of the cold war, the dismantling of apartheid and the emergence of new democracies. The question to be asked is whether there has been any progress concerning gender equality and women's human rights. The answer is yes, many advances have been reported around the world. However, the results are very unevenly spread across countries. So, progress has been variable and slow.

Many of the gains that women and girls have made are now under threat. Women are attacked for trying to enjoy their rights to education, are raped and turned into sex slaves, while they constitute the majority of the world's poor and illiterate. Moreover, in conflict situations we continue to see atrocities that transform the bodies of women into battlegrounds for warriors.

What are the reasons for this backlash? An international environment that is not conducive to the realization of human rights, in particular women's human rights.

The Commission on the Status of Women, its processes and their impact on women's empowerment.

Before examining the challenges in the external environment, we have to look into the United Nations system, in particular the Commission on the Status of Women, and whether it has delivered progress for women and girls.

We have to examine what has to change in the Commission on the Status of Women to make it a positive force for women's rights.

The active participation of non-governmental organizations is a critical element of the work of the Commission on the Status of Women. Yet the Commission on the Status of Women does not institutionalize consultations with women's non-governmental organizations that possess first-hand knowledge around what women need and are critical of their Member State's progress.

The Member State-centric process followed by the Commission on the Status of Women best represents Member State representatives of women and limits women's non-governmental organizations to the Non-Governmental Organization's Forum rather than giving them voice to deliberate as equals at official proceedings.

The United Nations should devise effective mechanisms of consultation with civil society organizations before the sessions of the Commission on the Status of Women and elsewhere. Feminist organizations should hold the Commission of the Status of Women accountable for the systematic participation of women in its processes.

Fundamentally, we need a new way of thinking. We need to effect a change in our global culture whereby United Nations member states will be convinced to acknowledge the value of the input and constructive criticisms of civil society.

Global challenges to gender equality, women's human rights and the empowerment of women

There are a lot of global challenges we have to face in the external environment like neoliberal policies, fundamentalisms, increased numbers of refugees and

displaced persons, climate change, poverty and violence, populism, the shrinking space for civil society, an emerging movement against gender ideology and many others.

The greatest challenge we have to deal with is neoliberal policies. Neoliberal capitalism is a key driver of the current global crisis. Its core positions are free market and profits, above people and the planet. Patriarchal structures are central to its current functions.

Neoliberal capitalism in its pursuit of profit has caused ecological devastation, underdevelopment, violence and repression through deepening authoritarianism worldwide.

It has provoked a dramatic increase in income inequalities across the world and a backlash against social and political gains resulting in an increase of systematic attacks on human rights in general and women's and vulnerable groups in particular by regressive forces that are coming to power in many parts of the world.

What can we do? Time has come to develop counter strategies from a feminist perspective.

Feminist organizations should transform neoliberal policies by using feminist economics. We have to rethink the very concept of the economy, if we want to make economic policies more gender equal. To begin with the economy should focus on well-being instead of competitiveness.

We need a new concept to bring care and unpaid care into the heart of the understanding of the economy. Care economy is one such concept, reproductive economy is another one. We should consider both as integral parts of the economy.

Feminist organizations should elaborate a gendered analysis of climate change, which is not just about collecting gender disaggregated data showing that the impact on men and women is different. Neither is the solution to simply ensure that equal numbers of men and women participate in climate change decision making. It is about including the knowledge and voices of women and men in designing effective responses to climate change. It is not just about women. It is about gender relations and how to change them.

Globalization and neoliberal policies have contributed to the growing influence and power of non-state actors such as business, financial institutions, corporations, over states and societies.

Today, corporate lobbying and interference in everyday governmental affairs is so significant, that it threatens the fundamental value of society namely, that the will of the people must be the basis for governments.

Transnational corporations exploit ideas of feminism and gender equality to improve their image in some countries, while systematically abusing women's human rights in other parts of the world.

Women's empowerment, once a radical feminist idea of transforming society, has been manipulated and reduced to an individualistic focus on self-esteem, entrepreneurship and consumerism.

Feminist organizations should support the elaboration, by the open-ended working group created by the Human Rights Council on 26 June 2014, of an internationally legally binding instrument to regulate within international human rights law, the activities of transnational corporations and other business in respect to human rights.

A very important aspect of our efforts to deal with global challenges has to do with power. We have to gain and retain power by transforming power relations between women and men which are anchored in patriarchy.

We know from research findings that women's substantive participation in peace processes increases the potential for these processes to succeed. The reasons are that women in their negotiations include broader issues than power in order to build a sustainable peaceful society. We need to systematically listen to them and learn from their leadership.

A deep concern is the rise of the concept of gender ideology. Right wing and reactionary forces fought against this concept as a social construct in Beijing. However, nowadays they are gaining ground amid the resurgence of conservatism and fundamentalism.

In recent years, the rise of right wing and nationalist populism across the world has led to an increasing number of governments implementing repressive measures against the space for civil society.

One way through which women's and girls' voices are silenced is through that shrinking space. Moreover, without the active input of women and girls we cannot advance and repeal the backlash against women's human rights and make governments accountable.

Neoliberal policies have exacerbated violence, although we have seen an unprecedented level of awareness globally due to the mobilization of women survivors of different forms of violence. Violence has persisted and deepened as the structural issues related to women's oppression have not been seriously addressed.

The same is the case with poverty. Policies elaborated by governments to reduce it have failed as they did not address structural inequalities neither the social and economic barriers that lie on the route to poverty. Women constitute half of the poor population globally.

In order to deal with the exacerbation of the above phenomena of poverty, violence, the shrinking space for civil society, climate change, power relations anchored in patriarchy, growing influence of corporations, the implementation of repressive measures by governments and the rise of the concept of gender ideology, all due to neoliberal policies, we should try to align these policies with international human rights law and promote the rights of the traditionally marginalized. Feminist organizations should report anti-rights organizations, hold them to account and build alliances with progressive policy makers and politicians.

The future we want: Our vision.

The alarming rise of all the challenges we have referred to can also be dealt with by revitalizing the conviction that multilateralism is the key to working together through global problem solving. We should also promote and lobby for a more democratic version of it in which citizens are enabled to have more agency and voice.

What is also alarming is the fact that Member States continue to pay lip service to the principle to leave no one behind. So, there is lack of political will from Member States to make the Sustainable Development Goals meaningful, including Sustainable Development Goal 5 on gender equality. There is also a general lack of political will to change development models to ones that prioritize people over profits.

2020 will be a crucial year for reaffirming, taking stock and moving forward the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Sustainable Development Goals.

We should plan and propose an alternative agenda and program of action based on answers to a number of questions such as: How has the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action been realized? What remains to be done? What are the new ideas on feminist agendas in 2020? What kind of new ideas do we need for the future?

In our view we must elaborate on this alternative agenda in which equality does not mean just women's issues. There is a need to move beyond binaries. Our strategies to resist the backlash on human and women's rights should take into account not only gender inequality but other inequalities as well. We have to accept the interconnected nature of inequalities.

Intersectionality recognizes that people can experience multiple oppressions, which intersect in powerful ways.

How do we make sure that this new alternative agenda is inclusive and addresses and challenges global issues as they impact the rights and position of women in different countries?

The answer to that will depend on whether an alternative narrative of our feminist goals can be built on the basis of our agenda that will allow us to bring regressive forces to a halt. For that we need allies to support us. Alliances with other like-minded organizations are likely to be especially necessary in difficult times. Mobilizing to have an impact, we must make advances firmly grounded in institutional frameworks and norms.
