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**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 Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, 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

It didn't happen

The year 2020 is meant to be a time of celebration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. It also marks the twentieth anniversary of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, on Women, Peace, and Security. It should have been: words delivered, deeds done. Peace and equality realized between people and between nations. The world thus enabled to work together to sort out our greatest threat: environmental degradation and climate change – the end of the earth as we know it.

If the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action had been translated into law, we would have a reason to celebrate. If the Women, Peace and Security Agenda had delivered on its promise there would be change for all of us. If society understood the importance and meaning of gender, we would be living in a different world.

It didn't happen! We know where we are, and we know why. It is indeed just as the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom said over 105 years ago: inequality continues and is growing between people, with the 1 per cent increasing their ownership of the world's resources; disparity continues between nations; militarism as a way of thought continues to dominate the security discourse; the arms trade fuels the above; and the neo-liberal system of economy ensures it. Add in our binary construction of gender, and we will arrive at 2020 without a great deal to celebrate.

The problem

As we know what the problem is, we know what has to be done about it. We must take urgent and concrete action to build up new understandings and systems of human security, economic justice, and peace for people and planet. We must tear down militarization, capitalism, and patriarchy.

The numbers speak for themselves. In 2017, the economic cost of violence globally was \$14.7 trillion (12.4 per cent of global gross domestic product (GDP), or \$1,988 per person). The single largest contributor to this cost was military expenditure (37 per cent), followed by internal spending on security (police, judicial, and prison system) (27 per cent). It is militarization that deforms our societies, stifles civil liberties, and wrecks the environment, often impeding use of land and water by poisoning natural resources or physically blocking access to resources. If we used the money spent on global violence (for which the nomenclature is inappropriately termed "security"), we could, for example, realize the Sustainable Development Goals. No small feat. Add in what we could do with the estimated 7-10 trillion dollars in tax havens, and the world would, indeed, look different.

The military system is bound up with the class inequalities of capitalism and the racist domination of some nations and ethnic groups by others. Since 1980, the top 1 per cent of the population has captured twice as much global income growth as the bottom 50 per cent. Large amounts of wealth have shifted from public to private hands in all countries. Global exploitation of natural resources has more than tripled in 50 years. The world is drastically off-course to realizing the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, an agreement which is not even bold enough to fully avert climate catastrophe. With this trajectory, the Sustainable Development Goal targets will not be met. More bad news: according to the World Economic Forum's 2018 Global Gender Gap Report, at the current rate, it will take 108 years to close the global gender gap and 202 years to achieve economic gender parity.

A set of new “what ifs”

How do we make the changes needed? What if we redesigned our political economy – from the household to the community to the multilateral system – so that everything we do is centred around preventing conflict, facilitates just redistribution of resources for the many rather than the accumulation of wealth for a few, and ensures environmental sustainability?

What if:

- We moved from militarized security to human security?
- By redefining security, we eliminated nuclear weapons and the arms trade?
- Every country had a ministry of peace, and it worked for peace domestically and internationally?
- We removed the construction of gendered norms and ended the gender binary?
- Every woman could live and work, confident in her safety and free to participate in her communities without violence?
- Economic actors promoted the realization of social and economic rights and worked within the constraints of the planet’s resources, and regulatory frameworks ensured that they did so?
- Governments listened to the science on the climate crisis and acted on it?
- The United Nations functioned and was coherent, and the Security Council actually upheld and delivered on the Charter of the United Nations, working for the people and not for the powerful?
- International law was restored as a means of regulation and peace.

What if, indeed, the “actions” of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action were completed? There are many more “what ifs”. But what is clear is that we have a choice. Either we make these “what ifs” real, and we find a new way of delivering, or we give in.

Giving in is not an option! To protect our planet from environmental and human destruction – whether you are in government, military, civil society, or, indeed, in the 1 per cent – we all must be activists now!
