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## Commission on the Status of Women

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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 Mothers’ Union, National Alliance of Women’s Organizations, National Board of Catholic Women of England and Wales, National Council of Women of Canada, Northern Ireland Women’s European Platform, Soroptimist International Great Britain and Ireland Limited, Wales Assembly of Women, and Widows Rights International, 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.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

2020 was a critical year. We were all provided with an opportunity to reassess the gains for society in light of the many anniversaries: the aspirations voiced and the commitments made in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the establishment of the United Nations, United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, the establishment of UN-Women and Agenda 2030.

Preparing for a year of action and awareness raising, to call States Parties and all of civil society alike to the possibilities for positive change, the world experienced a global situation the like of which it has never previously experienced – across the globe.

This year, as we take stock of our changed realities, it is vital that we continue as States Parties, United Nations agencies and civil society, to work together for the betterment of the world. It is clear that all the asks made by civil society over the years at the Commission on the Status of Women, although for women and girls, would also benefit the whole of society. Indeed, had States Parties implemented their promises from the varied international agreements cited above, we would have a different society now – and one with more resilience to the worst consequences of global risk.

It is clear that there has been progress in many areas including an increased acknowledgement that women and men are equal, greater access of girls to education and improved rights for women in legal and policy frameworks. Yet, despite the ideal of equality being acknowledged and voiced, its expression in all facets of life is very far from being the lived experience of women and girls around the world.

What are some of the key barriers to the realisation of equality? Why have there been setbacks in some areas? Why does humanity find it impossible to implement the numerous agreements closely negotiated at the United Nations? Are the methods we currently use fit for purpose?

The National Alliance of Women's Organisations and its partners call for a true examination of the current ordering of society. We need to work together to identify those barriers to equality being realised. If our aim is the peace and prosperity for all humanity, this can only be realised once there is equality of women and men and this can only be realised when decision-makers and activists feel keenly, and act, on the ideals of oneness and justice. We need to abandon the outmoded beliefs, cultural norms, and practices that have not served humanity's best interests, while building on the strengths of all peoples.

The pandemic has exacerbated existing weaknesses in the current social order and highlighted its failings. It gives us a unique opportunity to clarify what kind of society we want to create and put in place measures to ensure that the society we build coming out of COVID 19 is one where discrimination is a thing of the past and where power relations are redefined. Surely we need systems and structures that enable all people to thrive simultaneously. Is it not time to ask ourselves what expressions of power would give rise to such systems and structures?

Since Beijing, the discourse on advancing gender equality at the United Nations has focused on increasing access to power within the current systems and structures – which themselves have perpetuated and reinforced inequality. Many of the populations most affected by the negative aspects of our current systems find themselves absent from the discussions on the future of our world. It is therefore imperative to create spaces and opportunities for the peoples of the world to participate in processes of social change at every level of society.

It is clear that successful implementation of the goals and frameworks agreed upon such as those cited above, is actually only possible through local action. If local communities are the arena for action, community members cannot be excluded from decision-making processes regarding their own well-being. It is vital that women and girls are fully involved in all the spaces and processes where decisions are made about the well-being of nations, peoples, and communities. It is vital that especially those women who are never or seldom at the table, must be fully engaged in all aspects of decision making in matters that pertain to them: indigenous and older women; those with disabilities; who have been prostituted; are living in conflict zones; widows; for they know more than anyone else how policies and programmes impact on them.

Equality cannot be established solely through material means. Many other resources such as creativity, imagination, consultation, discernment and the power of unified and concerted action are limitless, and accessible to all. Would not, therefore, the discourse on the equality of women and men, at every level, including at the United Nations, be strengthened by creating structures that are inclusive, and based on mutual exchange and learning.

The National Alliance of Women's Organisations therefore asks the Commission on the Status of Women, in this most significant year, to robustly encourage all States Parties and other stakeholders, at all levels of governance, to make a bold shift in vision and outlook. We face a time of immense opportunity. We have seen collaboration on a scale undreamt of in times past. We have unparalleled prospects for progress. Failure to reach agreement on arrangements supporting effective global coordination risks catastrophic consequences. The task facing us all at this Commission, at this time, is to ensure that the machinery of international politics and power is guided toward cooperation and reciprocity: a re-ordering of structures and systems to ensure the full realisation of the equality of women and men.

We hold the conviction that the well-being of all people can only be secured through full commitment of world leaders to the betterment of humanity as a whole. Let the States Parties at this Commission show that commitment.

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