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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, 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

Mothers' Union is a non-governmental organisation in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council since 2000. Mothers' Union is a global, women led, volunteer Anglican movement with 4 Million members in 83 countries and exists to give a voice to the stigmatized and vulnerable around the world, particularly in the area of gender justice. As members of the Anglican Church, we are broadly aligned with the views of the Anglican Consultative Council.

Tackling the deep injustices of gender inequality is an integral part of our Anglican mission. This is based on our Christian belief that women and men are created equally in the image of God and that just relationships between women and men, girls and boys are fundamental to human flourishing. Sadly, the global family is falling drastically short of this Gospel imperative. Gendered attitudes, assumptions and stereotypes can shape negative behaviours and impose burdens on all of us. Harmful patterns of patriarchy and misogyny need to be held to the light of God's redemptive love. In this moment of celebration of twenty-five years of the Beijing Platform, we seek to uphold the intrinsic value of women and girls and the commitment to social justice and empowerment outlined in the Declaration, while lamenting that much of its powerful vision remains unrealized.

Importance of engagement with faith communities

Church leaders and faith communities have a pivotal role to play in transforming culturally embedded gender injustices. People of faith have sometimes been responsible for maintaining the status quo, or of reinforcing stereotyped constructions of masculinity and femininity that enable gender-based violence and other injustices, but, being embedded in our local communities, we are also uniquely positioned to facilitate change.

In common with Churches and agencies across the Anglican Communion, Mothers' Union have been challenging harmful narratives and actively promoting gender justice as integral to ensuring that all people have an opportunity to reach their God-given potential. This includes seeking ways to address sexual and gender-based violence, and implementing economic empowerment programmes for women and girls. In this way, churches and faith-based organizations including Mothers' Union are key partners in transforming injustice and ensuring the empowerment of women and girls.

Full and effective participation and decision-making in public life

Mothers' Union programmes around the world are led by women acting as volunteer facilitators in their communities. This builds the confidence of both the facilitators and the women with whom they work, and the skills they learn help them to gain respect and take on positions of authority in their local communities. For example in Ethiopia, the literacy programme teaches about relationships, nutrition, cultivation and hygiene as well as reading. As a result of the training, 25 women went on to have significant roles in their local Churches, as lay readers.

Elimination of violence: transforming unjust structures of society

A study by the World Health Organization showed that thirty-five per cent of women globally have experienced physical and/or sexual violence. Many more cases go unreported due to shame and stigma. Courageous victims who report to authorities

may be traumatised by lack of sensitivity from healthcare workers, police, and court officials. Many cases are not prosecuted and perpetrators are not brought to justice, particularly in conflict-affected countries.

The Anglican Consultative Council has called upon Member Churches to provide leadership on the issue of gender-based violence through education, advocacy, and modelling healthy relationships, and Mothers' Union has played, and is playing, a key role in this.

In Uganda, Myanmar, Tanzania and DRC, Mothers' Union is using media, specifically local radio, as well as existing groups and networks in the communities to promote GBV awareness and prevention of COVID-19 and the link between the two. In Uganda, this has already resulted in 25 girls being rescued from a perpetrator, and the perpetrator being brought to justice, because the media coverage had given members of the community the courage to speak up.

Prior to COVID-19, in conjunction with other partners including UNICEF, Mothers' Union developed an approach that focuses on heart and mind dialogue for behavioural change, challenging cultural norms and the role that women and faith leaders have in propagating violence in the community. These tools and processes are now being further adapted to be used at scale, without meeting in-person, to end violence, support healing and create gender champions from community to national level.

Women and sustainable development: responding to human need by loving service

A 2018 UN Women report highlighted that women remain less likely to participate in the labour market than men. Women's global labour force participation rate is 26.5 percentage points lower than men, and in forty per cent of economies, women's entrepreneurial activities face extreme disadvantages. Investing in women's economic empowerment is key to unlocking gender equality and ensuring full participation in God's abundance.

Since 2014, Mothers' Union has enabled over 32,500 people around the world, led predominantly by women, to join community savings and loan groups to help them to set up businesses, educate their children and feed their families. For example, in June 2019, there were 187 groups with 3900 members in Tanzania. Businesses set up included a chair hire enterprise and a soap business, and many were also providing wider support to their communities, for example, building a new classroom for the school and buying essential supplies for an orphanage.

Recommendations

In alignment with the Anglican Consultative Council, we urge Member States to:

Take urgent and accelerated action to fully implement and finance the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, in partnership with civil society and other stakeholders, including faith-based organisations and faith leaders, as well as implement other vital international agreements affecting the rights of women and girls, including the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, and the Sustainable Development Goals (particularly Goal 5: Gender Equality);

Recognise the positive role that faith and communities of faith are playing in the provision of social services, humanitarian response, building resilient communities, promoting well-being, transforming social norms, and achieving gender equality, and consider faith communities as integral partners within civil society;

In partnership with all sectors of society, take action to reduce gaps in and remove barriers to the full and equal representation of women in leadership and decision-making at all levels and in all sectors;

Design and implement gender-sensitive emergency interventions to mitigate the impacts of climate change and related disasters, with particular focus on meeting the needs of women, girls, the elderly, and persons with disabilities, including incorporating the traditional knowledge of indigenous communities;

Incorporate analysis of religious and customary systems in policymaking, and engage collaboratively with faith actors and women, girls, men and boys, to address harmful and discriminatory norms and practices that hinder progress in eliminating all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls;

Guarantee fair and equal access to justice for all victims of violence, including through increased support for shelters and other victim support programmes, training of law enforcement officials to ensure appropriate and gender-sensitive responses to reports of domestic violence, providing counselling and reparations for victims of violence, and implementing sexual harassment policies in all institutions of society;

Implement legislation and comprehensive legal protection to ensure issues around gender inequality are not treated in isolation, but rather with an acknowledgement of the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination women can experience based on gender, religion, ethnicity, cultural practice, race, socioeconomic status, age, or abilities.
