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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 Ordination Conference, 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

As we prepare for the next Commission on the Status of Women (CSW65), the progress of women's full and effective participation and decision-making in both state and non-state structures is being examined. Since 1975, the Women's Ordination Conference (WOC), the largest organization that is working for full equality of women in the Roman Catholic Church, has called attention to the lack of gender equity in the Catholic Church. The unequivocal and systematic exclusion of women from all leadership positions and decision-making on both the local and universal levels in the Church has a grave negative impact on all of civil society and violates the principles of the United Nations conventions.

While this discrimination may seem like an internal, institutional concern, because of the global presence of the Church, coupled with its supposed moral standards, the lack of gender equitable practices, laws and policies has undue influence. The Church neither models nor promotes the equality and human dignity outlined in the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women and in the Beijing Platform for Action, helping to perpetuate the idea that it is acceptable to subjugate and silence women.

Additionally, the Holy See enjoys Non-member State Permanent Observer status at the UN and takes part in the Commission on the Status of Women. By allowing one religion a privileged position in proceedings of the General Assembly and especially the Commission on the Status of Women, the UN is undercutting its own principles and hindering the achievement of goals for justice and the empowerment of women. As was noted at Commission on the Status of Women50, "without the active participation of women and incorporation of women's perspectives at all levels of decision-making, the goals of equality, development and peace could not be achieved."

The relationship between women's empowerment and sustainable, transformative development has long been recognized at the United Nations. As reiterated in the UN Security Resolution 1325, the inclusion of a gender perspective is "an integral part of the development process." (#10f) While Gender Equity is counted as one of the Sustainable Development Goals, in reality it undergirds all the Sustainable Development Goals.

As Catholics, we believe that the global and moral influence of the Catholic Church would be far more credible if the institution and its leaders practiced gender equity. Unfortunately, language employed by the all-male hierarchy of the Church may lull some into thinking that progress in equality is in process. Pope Francis writes in the apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, "The presence of women must also be guaranteed in the workplace and in various other settings where important decisions are made, both in the Church and in social structures" (103), yet no women are permitted to vote alongside their male counterparts in high-level meetings, nor permitted to lead any Church office where she may have authority equal to that of men.

Ironically, Pope Francis also writes on women's equality in his recent encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*, "We say one thing with words, but our decisions and reality tell another story" (23). This could not be truer of the Catholic institution and the Holy See.

Commission on the Status of Women65 seeks to accelerate the implementation of gender equity. It would seem essential to require the Holy See to adhere to the same standards and conventions that other member nations are held to. As noted in Paragraph 26 of the Concept Note, "Harmful social norms and practices are among

the underlying causes of women's limited voice and political agency." Roman Catholic Church discrimination against women's participation in decision-making is one of these harmful practices and is a critical barrier to gender equality. As reiterated in the Beijing Platform for Action, "Without the active participation of women and the incorporation of women's perspective at all levels of decision-making, the goals of equality, development and peace cannot be achieved." (G, 181).
