



# Economic and Social Council

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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 Canadian Federation of University 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.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

Canadian Federation of University Women, a Canadian organization established in 1919 represents more than 7,000 women across Canada whose vision includes a world where poverty is reduced, discrimination eliminated, where there are equal opportunities for leadership, employment, income, education, careers and to maximize potential. This vision of equal opportunities for women and girls is also reflected in Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy which was developed to support the building of a more peaceful, inclusive and prosperous world.

Women's full and effective participation and decision-making in public life is critical to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals. In this statement, Canadian Federation of University Women will speak to the role of women's leadership in the cross-cutting areas of Good Health and Well-Being, Quality Education, Decent Work and Economic Growth, and Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions.

The COVID-19 pandemic has unequivocally demonstrated that we are connected as a global community – where dynamic leadership reflecting the pluralism of society is required to solve the complex problems the world faces. Moreover, the pandemic reinforces how good health and well-being are intrinsically linked to human existence.

In the public sphere, women comprise a majority of the health and social care workforce but make up less than 30 per cent of leaders in the public health sector according to a report from Global Health 50/50. A 2013 report by Rock Health entitled "Women in Healthcare" goes further by citing that although women constitute the majority of the health care workforce, they hold only 19 percent of the hospital Chief Executive Officer positions, and they head up only 4 per cent of health care companies. Given the persisting gender norms surrounding women in the labour force, it is not surprising that when women in health care are promoted to leadership positions, their advancement is into service-oriented functions rather than operational and strategic leadership positions.

Gender gaps in global health leadership is particularly problematic because addressing women's health and health inequalities is central to progress in the global health agenda. According to UN Women, evidence across sectors shows that diversified leadership results in better outcomes and that failing to include women in decision-making processes results in less effective policy and can even do harm. Canada may be in the forefront in showing that women possess the technical skills and other requisite qualities needed to be in senior leadership roles. Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, 7 of 14 provincial and national chief medical officers and public health officers are women, including Canada's chief medical officer and the Chief Science Advisor to the Prime Minister. This group of women may be the first signs of change to the issue of women's underrepresentation in the most prestigious leadership roles in health. The COVID-19 crisis has provided an unexpected opportunity for women to be the voice and face of health authority in Canada – a very welcomed shift in role models.

Similar to health care, education is a sector in which the workforce is dominated by women. Women are over-represented among teaching staff at lower education levels, but remain underrepresented in secondary and post-secondary education, senior management, and other related leadership positions within educational institutions. As our organization views education as the central and fundamental tool to equality, improving the participation of women in leadership roles within the education sector is an issue which requires immediate attention.

Ensuring women's full and equal participation in education leadership is crucial to achieving goals for inclusive quality education. Women in education leadership positions serve as important role models for female students and help with student retention, especially in countries with low education attainment for girls (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Global Education Monitoring Report). For example, in Malawi a lack of female role models is considered one of the top four reasons for girls' poor performance, ahead of pregnancy and early marriage. Female teachers in male-dominated subjects such as mathematics or engineering can ameliorate implicit gender bias in academic outcomes and career trajectories for girls in these sectors. Putting girls at the centre of Beijing+25 and Generation Equality processes is crucial, so they are included in decision-making about their education and future (Save the Children Global Girlhood Report).

Turning to the economy, the full participation of women in all segments of the economy, is morally compelling and also the smart thing to do. COVID-19 will force economies to reset across the world. This recovery phase may be the very time that women's leadership in the economic sphere can be actualized, as articulated by the Feminist Economic Recovery Plan for Canada. In 2015 the McKinsey Global Institute estimated that advancing women's equality could add \$12 Trillion to global growth. The Institute linked economic potential to equity in work, essential services and enablers for economic opportunity, legal protection and political voice, and physical security and autonomy. If sustainable economic growth is to be realized, 50 per cent of the world's population must be allowed to contribute more than 37 per cent of Gross Domestic Product and as stated by the National Domestic Alliance at a previous United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, "Domestic work is the work that makes everything else possible". We cannot forget those whose essential labour in the private sphere goes unpaid and undervalued.

The United Nations Development Programme has identified five priorities for a socio-economic recovery, post the COVID-19 pandemic. These five pillar priorities present an opportunity to create a more equitable, just and peaceful world. Concurrently, 2020 marks the 20th anniversary of the landmark 1325 Resolution on Women, Peace and Security that reaffirms the important role of women's leadership in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and peacebuilding. Women's full participation in peace negotiations has substantial impacts on the durability of agreements – they are 35 per cent more likely to last at least 15 years when women participate (International Peace Institute). Despite the evidence of women's critical contribution to peace and security, women's participation and leadership in peace processes have lagged. There is an urgent need to prioritize women's participation and leadership in peacebuilding within areas of protracted conflict. For example, Afghan women must be fully and equitably involved in all dimensions of the Afghanistan peace process and further conflict-prevention measures, and the international community must ensure there is adherence to a peace agreement that does not exclude Afghan women. Women in political and human rights leadership must be protected from the violence that is perpetuated against them for their roles in public life.

In conclusion, substantive progress for gender equality can only be made in an environment of multinational action, allyship, interdisciplinary expertise and collaboration, and intergenerational problem solving and innovation (Generation Equality). We support the integrated approach provided by the Feminist and Women's Action Plan. We recognise the crucial importance of monitoring and evaluation of gender specific targets in accordance with international frameworks for progress. In order to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls, a transformative approach must be taken to address fundamental structural inequalities that harm, disadvantage, and discriminate against women.

Canadian Federation of University Women and other civil society stakeholders will continue to hold our respective Member States accountable for activity identified in multiyear work plans. Civil society must also hold Member States accountable for progress on institutional barriers to gender equality. Women's full and effective participation and decision-making, the elimination of violence, and the empowerment of all women and girls relies on the cooperation of all stakeholders to enact meaningful change for a more inclusive and equitable world.

Accordingly, Canadian Federation of University Women calls on Member States:

To promote inclusive governance, increased participation of women as parliamentarians, as government ministers in roles with budgetary authority;

to embrace the five-pillar framework for post COVID-19 socio-economic recovery and ensure that women are at leadership and decision-making tables in each of the priorities identified;

to enable the leadership of women in educational institutions, educational policy and research;

to promote legislative measures that support land ownership by women and financial inclusion for women by equal access to capital, markets, digital technology and business development services and

to protect women in political leadership and human rights activists against violence.

Women have been and will continue to be powerful agents of change.

This statement is endorsed by: Graduate Women International, International Alliance of Women, National Council of Women of Canada, Women Graduates-USA, and YWCA of Canada.

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