



# Economic and Social Council

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## Commission on the Status of Women

Sixty-sixth session

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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 Federation of American Women’s Clubs Overseas (FAWCO), Graduate Women International (GWI), International Alliance of Women, International Council of Women, International Federation of Business and Professional Women, Latter-day Saint Charities, Mother’s Legacy Project, National Alliance of Women’s Organizations, National Council of Women of Canada, Soroptimist International, The Canadian Federation of Business and Professional Women, Widows Rights International, Women’s Federation for World Peace International, and Zonta 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

During the forthcoming sixty-sixth session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), the report of the Secretary General will review the functioning and methods of work of the Commission. This document is a follow up from the resolution agreed during the fifty-ninth session and aims to continue the momentum for rethinking the role of NGOs/CSOs in the work of the Commission, including the necessity of establishing formal and informal virtual spaces, as Covid-19 remains a lived reality. Civil Society is concerned about the shrinking space for participation in United Nations processes. Despite the various resolutions and attempts over the years to improve the functioning of CSW, Civil Society still experiences fewer opportunities for meaningful engagement.

Originally set up as a States Party space, there is a desire from Civil Society for more equal status in UN processes. States Parties may be concerned that those they work with from Civil Society have the relevant experience and expertise to understand the political realities under which they function at the UN. Civil Society is concerned that the voices of those impacted by decisions made at the UN should be included in all consultations prior to decisions being made and involved in their implementation. Such representation is a key factor in re-thinking the way UN processes can be improved, providing a portal for those previously unable to participate to do so.

The engagement and cooperation between the Commission and non-governmental organizations must be considered through the ongoing challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic. These new set of challenges such as unequal access to vaccines, mixed vaccines doses, authorized and recognised available vaccines based on either donor states or the United Nations Covax program and national health measures policies not excluding, vaccine passports for travelling and access into certain indoors spaces are an addition to the already existing financial disparities due to high financial costs incurred by non-governmental organisations such as travel and accommodation, in addition to visa entry. Virtual space must be considered in order to ensure full participation of Civil Society and grass roots women and girls from all sectors and strata of society, it is vital that geographical caucus representatives are included in these processes at all stages.

The United Nations Charter through article 71 recognizes the vital, equal role governments and civil society play within the context of the Economic and Social Council, by according consultative status to non-governmental organizations. As a result, women and women organizations have become key players in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the International Conference on Population and Development and the outcome documents of their review, addressing gender equality and women's empowerment.

Furthermore, Resolution II as contained in the Report of the fifty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women ([E/2015/27-E/CN.6/2015/10](#)) (Resolution II), recognizes the full participation of the of non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council. As defined in Resolution 1996/31 "Consultative relationship between the United Nations and non-governmental organizations" the three areas organizations with consultative status participate in the works of the Commission: (a) written statements; (b) oral presentations during meetings; (c) consultation with the Secretariat.

Resolution II recognizes the importance of non-governmental organizations in advancing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and their potential contributions in such areas as consideration of the priority theme, emerging issues, and their inclusion on delegations as technical experts.

We recommend:

The establishment of an interactive working virtual space for States Parties and Civil Society, within the context of CSW. This would include strategy meetings and negotiation processes before, during and after CSW. Currently envisaged to be virtual in the context of COVID, these provisions would be continued with a hybrid of virtual and face to face meetings as the UN opens. (It is recognised that virtual events enable greater participation from across the globe and enable those who might not be able to participate face to face due to costs and visa challenges, to engage. However, States Parties need to ensure domestic NGOs are enabled to participate by providing robust internet provision for CSW access and participation).

The aim is to ensure formal and informal spaces for meaningful and substantial interaction between Civil Society and States Parties and recognised as an integral part of all United Nations processes. Whilst this document relates primarily to the Commission on the Status of Women, the vision is for a positive working relationship between States Parties and Civil Society to be established, developed, strengthened and preserved, within the context of CSW, but also potentially within other UN processes.

### **The role of UN Women and Regional Caucuses**

UNWomen, in pursuance of its mandate and desire for full engagement with Civil Society must continue to engage and consult with the Regional Caucuses in regard to Civil Society participation in CSW and continue to ensure presence at the caucus meetings, prior, during and post CSW as regional caucuses are linked and connected to grass roots organisations fulfilling the principle of “No one left behind”. As such, the CSW Bureau must ensure updates on Agreed Conclusions are published in all UN languages in a timely manner and make these available to Civil Society in order to ensure full engagement of women and girls globally.

Within this space, UN agencies, including Special Rapporteurs or Representatives, working with women and girls, meet with Regional Caucuses during the year for collaborative interaction on issues relating to CSW themes. The outcome documents from these meetings can be used to inform negotiations.

Therefore, Regional Caucuses are invited to submit suggested members for the High Level Expert Group prior to CSW discussing the themes of the upcoming CSW. Regional Caucuses are invited to submit proposed zero drafts to UN Women to inform their zero draft prior to the zero draft formal process. Equally, Civil Society must ensure robust effort is made to reach out to women and girls from all sectors and strata of society to include voices not yet or rarely heard, in order for them to be included in all spaces and discourses.

### **Conclusion**

The adoption of virtual formal and informal space will allow for NGOs/CSOs full cooperation and engagement with the Commission, ensuring an equitable and sustainable method of work in the future of all upcoming CSW sessions.