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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 American Association 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.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

The American Association of University Women supports the sixty-sixth session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women; priority theme: Achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the context of climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction policies and programmes; review theme: Women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work (agreed conclusions of the sixty-first session).

The Association, a nonpartisan, non-profit organization is a leader in advancing gender equity for women and girls through research, education and advocacy. With more than 170,000 global members and supporters, as well as 1,000 branches and 800 college and university partners, for 140 years the Association has promoted the economic, social, and physical well-being of all persons. Basic to all of its public policy efforts is the understanding that true equity requires a balance between the rights of the individual and the needs of the community. The Association opposes all forms of discrimination and supports constitutional protection for the civil rights of all individuals.

The Association believes that global interdependence requires national and international policies against human trafficking and that promote peace, justice, human rights, sustainable development, and mutual security for all people. We support the civil and human rights of all immigrants, including a fair and just path to legal status. We support a strengthened United Nations and its affiliated agencies. We support implementation of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, advocate implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action from the 4th World Conference on Women and subsequent declarations and affirm our active participation for the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

Essential to the economic, social, and physical well-being of all persons are an economy that provides: equitable employment opportunities; reduction of poverty; a living wage; quality, affordable dependent care; paid family and medical leave; safe, livable, and affordable housing; affordable, and accessible health care for all, including reproductive health care; and a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment.

There are numerous deep, culturally embedded biases and assumptions about women in the workplace which hinder women's advancement and success. While some employers have been vocal in their commitment to fair pay and promotions, flexible workplaces, access to childcare and other vital workplace supports – women can't wait for trickle-down change. The Association is dedicated to effecting change for women and families by providing ground-breaking research, advocacy, training and leadership tools, and over \$5 million in educational funding in direct support of programs to close the gender gap across sectors.

The "agreed conclusions" adopted by the Commission at its sixty-first session ([E/2017/27](#)) set out the steps and measures necessary to overcome persistent inequalities, discrimination and barriers that women face in the current world of work, and action that is needed to ensure that women can take full advantage of the opportunities arising as the world of work for women at all levels continue to evolve. The Association affirms the recommendations and acknowledges that the world of work has changed dramatically since adoption of the recommendations.

The participation of women in the labor force in the United States is the lowest in more than 30 years as the pandemic's impact continues to land on women more harshly than men. Working women, who lacked societal supports before the pandemic, have been dealt devastating setbacks. Mothers, in particular, across income

ranges, have been forced to take on additional child and family care responsibilities as schools and daycares continue to have close temporarily or permanently due to pandemic health- and staff-related disruptions.

It is vital that Member States and the United Nations implement a gendered response to the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure that women and girls benefit not only during the crisis, but during recovery, and as they begin to build back from the devastation of the pandemic, nations must ensure that women not only survive – but thrive. The COVID-19 crisis exposed the countless inequities women across societies face. Low income, part-time, and women of color globally were especially hard hit – and the consequences of that continue to reverberate. Their rates of return to the workforce and financial recovery are significantly behind other groups – with life-changing financial implications. With remote employment now becoming the norm, women are seeking more flexible workplaces, greater work-life balance, re-thinking their careers and in many cases downshifting to accommodate a more balanced career and home life.

The pandemic and its recovery offers the United Nations and its entities a unique opportunity not only to tackle the immediate workplace problems, but also to address the underlying issues that led to them. Leaders and institutions must seize the moment to ensure that recovery and rebuilding proceeds in a way that allows women and their families to thrive.

The changed and changing world of work requires a long-term recovery plan aimed at improving and building systems needed to ensure a stronger future for all women, and crisis recovery requires a multi-faceted response. For the world economies to fully recover in the months and years ahead, women will need access to good jobs, affordable health care, paid leave, high quality child care and pathways to educational opportunities and training that prepare them for the jobs of the future. Women cannot return to the workforce without these essential resources in place – resulting in the potential ongoing widening of the gender gap with an unrelenting, unprecedented and detrimental impact on women and families.

Women continue to bear a disproportionate burden of the ongoing health and economic crises. The American Association of University Women urges Member States and the United Nations to enact bold measures to ensure that the short- and long-term needs of women are met. Women and families must be at the center of a strong COVID-19 economic recovery for nations as the world of work is re-imagined to meet the changing needs of women and society. The Association believes that working together, nations can reach true gender equality in education, economic security, and leadership to achieve equity for all.