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peace for the twenty-first century”

Statement submitted by Concerned Women for America (CWA), Mujer para la Mujer A.C., and Vida y Familia de Guadalajara A.C., 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.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls

In the last decades, we have witnessed the integration of women into professional and public life in today's world. Undoubtedly, the position and rights of women have been advanced universally. Unfortunately, it is also true that we have many challenges ahead. Among those, we would like to highlight two that we believe are essential to overcoming some of the main challenges for women worldwide: access to education and balance between family and professional life.

Education

Women represent a majority of the poor in most of the regions of the world, according to the World Bank. Seventy percent of the poor do not have access to advanced education, only to some primary education. More than 40 per cent of the global poor live in economies affected by fragility. When we are talking about women's empowerment, we must ensure that women will have access to education; this does not mean that they will have access to school. It means to ensure that they will have the opportunity to complete the higher levels of education to acquire the tools to overcome poverty, care for their family, and be an active part of today's world economy.

Women who have access to education will be aware of their rights, be informed about healthcare and nutrition, and have access to new opportunities for their lives and their families. There is a direct link between education and poverty. We must invest in education to improve women's lives, especially in rural areas, where the current COVID crisis and other factors are hitting harder and leaving women even further behind.

We cannot pretend to care about women if we are unwilling to join efforts to ensure that the most vulnerable will have access to the most basic human right of education along with clean water, food, and others.

Conciliation of family and profession

On the other hand, we have those women who fortunately have had access to better opportunities, and today they are on the path to success within their professions. Those women also have their challenges. One of the major ones is to balance their personal, professional, and family life.

Governments, international organizations, and other entities often encourage women to prioritize their professional life over their family life. They try to create policies from a narrow perspective in which women and men are absolutely equal. This is a mistake. Equal does not mean the same. Women and men are different, but they are equal in dignity.

If we want to talk about empowering women, we must start by recognizing the differences between men and women, and from that view, creating policies that will allow women to have access to the same opportunities but under different conditions than men. It does not mean that they must have absolutely the same. It's appropriate to remember that justice means the will to render to each his due. What a woman is due must go side by side with who she is as a woman.

To empower women should not refer uniquely to their professional lives because this is just one aspect of women's lives. We have to emphasize empowerment in their other areas of life, such as their family and their private life. The current narrative of

empowerment tends to use a model of maleness as the way to succeed in life. We never explore what is unique about a woman's femininity and how she can contribute to society from her perspective as a woman. To allow women to contribute this uniqueness to the world will mean that we are empowering them.

The message is which empowerment means to postpone maternity, marriage, family, or even to eliminate these things from her life so she can triumph in life, impoverishes a woman's contribution. Men and women are different, but those differences enrich our society. We must allow women's femininity and strength to flourish so the world will flourish with it.

Concerned Women for America will continue working to see that all women have the same opportunities for education and empower those who do to make career decisions based on what they bring to the table as women and what goals they have set for their lives. Strength in these areas brings strength to all women.
