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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-seventh session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women; priority theme: Innovation and technological change, and education in the digital age for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls; review theme: Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls (agreed conclusions of the sixty-second 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 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.

The Association supports implementation of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, and works in particular to advance Sustainable Development Goal 4 to “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all,” including to “eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education”; and Sustainable Development Goal 5 to “Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.” Sustainable Development Goal 5 importantly outlines the target of “enhanc[ing] the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women.”

Technology and innovation can serve to advance gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls by improving access to information, communication, education, and economic opportunities. Digital technologies have become increasingly important during the ongoing global COVID-19 pandemic; yet access to the use and benefits of technology and innovation remains inequitable. For example, the International Telecommunications Union estimates that the global gender gap in Internet users in 2021 was 5% – with 57% of women using the Internet globally, compared to 62% of men – and remains much wider in poorer countries.

Many women and girls are themselves drivers of innovation around the globe, but continue to face barriers including lack of access to the Internet, other technologies like mobile phones, and to affordable finance. For example, women-led start-ups received just 2.3% of global venture capital funding in 2020. Yet we know that when women are empowered through education, opportunities, and investment, they succeed – according to UN-Women, start-ups led by women yield 35% higher returns than those led by men. Investment in the skills, knowledge, and potential of women and girls is critical to closing the gender gap and to ensuring that technology and innovation serve all.

Technology and innovation, however, also risk creating or exacerbating inequities, particularly when biases in research and development lead to “gender-blind” approaches. Artificial intelligence (AI), for example, has produced significant gender and racial equity issues through inequitable access, misuse, and sexism and racism entrenched in the development and application of those technologies. Like in other technology sectors, women are severely underrepresented in the field of artificial intelligence – comprising only 12% of researchers and 6% of developers – while the majority of developers are white men. In the age of rapidly advancing digital technologies, it is vital that Member States and the United Nations take urgent action to protect the human rights of women and girls and all marginalized people.

Gender biases and stereotypes, too, remain a significant barrier to girls’ progress and success in education, particularly in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM). Teachers and parents often underestimate girls’ math abilities, and many girls lose confidence in math by the third grade. Black and Latina girls and women, in particular, are even more likely to be dissuaded from pursuing math and science, due to discrimination and less access to critical resources, opportunities, and role models. From a young age, girls self-assess lower than boys with similar achievement levels; teachers, too, grade girls harder than boys for the same work. As early education plays a critical role in girls’ development, these messages set the stage for their level of interest, confidence, and achievements, particularly in science, technology, engineering, and math.

Gaps in women’s pursuit of science, technology, engineering, and math continue into their secondary and postsecondary studies, and beyond. Women made up just 45% of college students majoring in science, technology, engineering, and math in 2020, despite representing the majority of students enrolled across all sectors of higher education. Once in the workforce, women remain underrepresented across science, technology, engineering, and math occupations, particularly in computing and engineering where they make up just 25.2% and 16.5% of workers, respectively. Women, and particularly women of color, in fields like computer science and engineering more often face harassment and gender biases, which continue to hinder women’s participation and progress in education and the professional world.

The Association works to advance women and girls’ access to science, technology, engineering, and math education through programming, advocacy, and fellowships and grants, informed by our critical research on the gender science, technology, engineering, and math gap. The Association’s STEMEd for Girls program, launched in 2021, is designed to pave the way for high school girls’ success in science, technology, engineering, and math in college and careers. Through a series of virtual workshops and mentorship from STEM Ambassadors, girls are empowered to explore their interests and opportunities in science, technology, engineering, and math. Notably, the Association’s fellowships and grants have supported women’s graduate education, including in fields in which women are underrepresented such as science, technology, engineering, and math, since 1888. The Association will continue to promote educational equity and women and girls’ advancement in science, technology, engineering, and math throughout their educational and professional careers.

As UN-Women’s Innovation Strategy highlights, approaches to innovation and the advancement of technology must be gender-responsive – integrating women and girls’ voices, lived experiences, and expertise to create more equitable progress. The American Association of University Women urges Member States and the United Nations to enact bold measures to ensure women and girls’ equitable access to, and participation in, the advancement of technology and innovation, including science, technology, engineering, and math education; and to promote and utilize gender-responsive approaches to research, data collection, and the development of

technology to mitigate biases and meet the needs of women, girls, and all people. The Association believes that working together, nations can reach true gender equality in education, economic security, and leadership to achieve equity for all.
