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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 Fondazione Proclade Internazionale – Onlus, 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 Fondazione PROCLADE International is an organization that has been supporting processes of empowerment of women and girls in 72 countries, including Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Democratic Republic of Congo, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mexico, Nigeria, Sri Lanka, Uruguay, Venezuela and Zimbabwe, through programs of integral development towards parity and social inclusion.

We present our statement on the revision of social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructures for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

Progress: legislation promoting gender equity

Social protection is one of the essential instruments for development and human fulfilment. It has to remedy the structural inequalities that women have suffered for decades in terms of access to job opportunities, education, health, housing, and to legislative, executive and judicial services.

The vast majority of Member States have legislated towards the political participation of women. This has brought in a near gender parity in the democratic and constitutive processes.

We note that a large majority of member States have incorporated into their legislation laws that promote the integral social development of women and girls, prioritizing the right to: a life free of violence; access to education and culture free of gender stereotypes; a healthy life; sexual and reproductive rights; better opportunities for work; land and productive resources; quality in employment and the development of labor skills; social protection and security; equal participation in all areas of political, economic and social life, among others. Gender are rights are human rights. Hence States have been implementing measures to guarantee the principle of equality and non-discrimination through legal frameworks and public policies.

Some of these laws are related to Sexual Health and Responsible Procreation, Comprehensive Sexual Education, Surgical Contraception, for the prevention and punishment of human trafficking and assistance to the victims of trafficking, gender equality in marriage and Gender Identity.

A few States have established the retirement regulations of for women recognizing their years of work as well as the tasks of bearing and caring for their children.

Obstacles and Challenges

- The first and great obstacle to establishing social protection systems that generate empowerment and gender equity, is that the vast majority of policies expressed in the law, are not fulfilled in the countries; moreover, there is still a patriarchal and sexist regime that prevents the empowerment of women and the aspiration to an egalitarian life.
- Boys and girls are encouraged to enter the educational institutions, but there is a high dropout rate among adolescent girls and women.
- Girls and women do not have access to adequate sex education on reproductive and general health care.
- Medical centers specializing in gynecology, obstetrics and maternity are not properly equipped and the equipment at use are obsolete.

- Poverty in urban hillsides and rural areas does not allow girls access to sanitary articles when they menstruate. The toilets in public educational institutions are unsanitary and sometimes do not have water facility.
- The legal systems are incompetent. The process of reporting physical violence, sexual harassment and sexual abuse against women in the vast majority of member States are ineffective, late and disrespectful. The systems revictimizes the victims many times without generating justice.
- The vast majority of laws related to make men assume responsibility for paternity and to claim compensation by women at the situation of separation, involve complicated legal and bureaucratic procedures and availing of the assistance of lawyers is very expensive for women.
- There is no adequate regularization in the labor sphere in terms of equal pay for men and women, nor in terms of hiring minimum percentages of women.
- There are still strong gender stereotypes that socially place on women all the burden of work within the home, and therefore, the distribution of domestic work is completely unequal.
- There are laws that oblige public and private institutions to hire people with disabilities, but they do not specify the equal percentage in terms of gender. Therefore, women with disabilities have less access to the labor market.

Recommendations

To the full implementation of the agreed conclusions of Commission on the Status of Women 61, we recommend and emphasize the following:

- Establish economic and social policies for women's economic empowerment and labor regulations ensuring minimum percentages of women and women with disabilities.
- Strengthen normative and legal frameworks for the single women to claim their social and financial support without complicated bureaucracy.
- Providing girls and women with better toilet facilities in public educational institutions to improve public health and hygiene.
- Strengthening education, training, and skill development, creating awareness among women and girls of detrimental cultures and traditions, and challenging stereotypes and traditional gender norms are essential.
- Implement women protection programs to prevent femicides and domestic violence, and to promote security for women.
- Create access for adequate social security for indigenous and Afro-descendant women.
- Uphold and enforce laws that protect women's rights, ensuring equal pay.
- Establish community centers, especially in rural areas, that provide health care, education and vocational training to improve the status of women and their access to essential services and economic opportunities.
- Implement United Nations strategies and programs to empower women through its agencies and organizations such as Food and Agriculture Organization.
- That the governments of the countries, communes, cities, provinces offer a real opportunity to grassroots organizations (Non-Governmental Organizations, Citizen Movements) to participate in decision making and in the implementation of programs aimed at gender equality and women's empowerment.