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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 The National YWCA of Korea, 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.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

The National YWCA of Korea has been actively engaged in a citizens' movement aimed at addressing the gender wage gap in the labor market, grounded in the principle of equal pay for work of equal value, since 2015. We have also advocated for government-level policy initiatives in this matter. These endeavors led to the establishment of Equal Pay Day in South Korea in 2020.

Subsequent to the enactment of laws related to Equal Pay Day, discussions surrounding the introduction of a gender-equality wage disclosure system commenced during the presidential election process. Various government departments, such as the Ministry of Employment and Labor and the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, introduced policy proposals with the aim of creating a just and gender-equal work environment. The administration of President Yoon Suk-yeol proposed the phased implementation of a gender-equality wage disclosure system as part of its agenda to 'establish a fair labor-management relationship and promote equal employment opportunities.' This plan involves encouraging businesses to voluntarily disclose information regarding the gender wage gap at different stages, including recruitment, employment, and retirement. The primary focus is on creating a discrimination-free work environment that supports women in balancing work and childcare, thereby preventing career interruptions. Furthermore, under the gender employment disclosure system, essential disclosure elements have been specified, encompassing gender ratios of applicants and final hires during the recruitment stage, gender ratios of employees, promotions, and users of childcare leave during the employment stage, and gender ratios of individuals dismissed, opting for early retirement, or facing mandatory retirement during the retirement stage. This plan encourages voluntary participation by companies employing 500 or more individuals and proposes methods for the development and promotion of a gender employment disclosure system to mitigate the burden on businesses.

However, even one and a half years into the Yoon Suk-yeol administration, these plans have not been executed, and notably, the Ministry of Employment and Labor included in its 2023 major operational plans the implementation of gender wage disclosure system from public institutions in the second half of 2023, but it has not been put into practice. Among the disclosed items at various stages, such as recruitment, employment, and retirement, the current major disclosure items remain extremely limited, including maternity leave users and executive gender ratios, and the majority of items, such as the gender ratio of employees, promotions, and female managers, are not disclosed.

The European Union, subsequent to the 2014 Recommendation on Pay Transparency, strives to prevent wage discrimination and eliminate gender wage gaps within the European Union. On April 24, 2023, they approved the 'Pay Transparency Directive.' The European Union acknowledges that the absence of wage transparency constitutes a significant impediment to closing the gender wage gap, which has remained at an average of around 13% in 2020, with enduring consequences, including an impact on the pension wage gap, which can reach up to 30% (European Union, statistics on income and living conditions survey, 2019).

Nonetheless, despite being the country with the largest gender wage gap for 27 years since joining the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development in 1996 (OECD, Gender Wage Gap, 2023), South Korea has failed to secure wage transparency effectively. In 2022, the average wage for women in publicly traded South Korean companies amounted to only 70% of men's wages. This wage gap not only diminishes the quality of life for women but also exposes them to an elevated risk of poverty. Furthermore, South Korea ranks at the bottom among comparable

countries across various gender equality indices, including the gender wage gap, the economic participation rate, the representation of women on company boards, and the number of women in managerial positions (Economist's Glass-Ceiling Index, 2023). The deficiency of women's promotion opportunities can be attributed to deep-rooted patriarchal practices and persistent gender biases. Moreover, discrimination remains tacitly accepted at the national level.

In 2019, the National Human Rights Commission of South Korea issued a decision pertaining to gender wage gaps among blue-collar workers (National Human Rights Commission, 18-0107300). The decision underscored that women experienced unreasonable discrimination driven by gender biases and stereotypes when they were unfairly subjected to grade disparities and excluded from promotions solely based on their gender. Recommendations were made to put an end to these practices and take active measures to eliminate gender discrimination. However, the case filed against the respective company for violating the Equal Employment Act based on these recommendations was dismissed without charges.

Furthermore, at the labor inspection stage of the Ministry of Employment and Labor, rectifying discrimination against women proves to be a formidable challenge. This is mainly due to the absence of instances where the Ministry of Employment and Labor has proactively monitored or investigated longstanding gender discrimination cases. Conversely, under the government led by President Yoon Suk-yeol, the Ministry of Employment and Labor revised its enforcement rules in 2022, obligating companies to submit gender-equality wage disclosure data solely for the overall average income of all female and male employees, as opposed to specific occupations or positions. Consequently, even the existing system is compromised, diminishing the effectiveness of efforts to reduce the gender wage gap at the national level. Furthermore, the South Korean government's attempt to abolish the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, a dedicated department for gender equality policies, further undermines the existing system.

The establishment of Equal Pay Day was accomplished through the collective endeavors of women's civil society organizations, experts, and female members of parliament. To translate these efforts into practical results, it is imperative to fortify policies aimed at addressing gender-based discrimination in the labor market. This encompasses promoting women's economic participation, implementing measures to prevent career interruptions, and enacting laws on pay transparency.

The United Nations, guided by Sustainable Development Goal 5 and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, aspires to advance women's economic rights and eradicate employment discrimination based on gender. As a member state of the United Nations, South Korea bears the responsibility to uphold agreements reached within the United Nations. South Korea, in conjunction with other United Nations member states, must actively engage in collaborative endeavors to eliminate the gender wage gap by closely monitoring international developments and implementations.

Therefore, The National YWCA of Korea strongly recommends the following:

- Eliminate discrimination against women in the field of employment ensure equal pay for equal work and provide a safe working environment in accordance with Article 11.1 of Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW, Article 11.1).
- Enact and enforce laws and develop workplace policies against gender discrimination in the labour market in accordance with Strategic Objective F.5 of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, F.5).

The National YWCA of Korea will persist in its efforts, in collaboration with Korean civil society organizations and YWCA member organizations worldwide, to diminish the gender wage gap and oppose national and societal initiatives that undermine gender equality.

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