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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 Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America, 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 Episcopal Church is a Christian denomination of 1.8 million members in 17 nations in North America, Latin America & the Caribbean, Europe and Asia & the Pacific and a member province of the worldwide Anglican Communion, the third largest Christian denomination.

As Christians, Episcopalians believe that God created all of creation and all humans equally in God's image, worthy of dignity, love, liberty, and life-giving relationships with God and each other. Our scriptures, Jesus' way of love, and our baptismal covenant call us to love God and each other as ourselves, to seek and serve Christ in all persons and to care for creation. Responding to God's abundant grace and love, we affirm the call to empower women and girls in all their diversity, including transgender and non-binary persons.

Our Christian values explain The Episcopal Church's affirmation of United Nations international conventions, agreements and declarations calling for just and equal treatment of women and girls in all their diversity. Episcopalians support them through their mission, programs, legislation, policies and advocacy by individuals, women's groups, congregations, dioceses, schools, seminaries, agencies, and networks. We celebrate their powerful agency in society as innovators, entrepreneurs, stakeholders, decision-makers, educators, caretakers, Indigenous and traditional knowledge keepers, storytellers, speakers and more.

Episcopalians contribute to accelerating gender equality and empowering women and girls by addressing poverty and strengthening institutions and financing with a gender perspective. Caring and advocating for the poor is a Christian mandate practiced through innumerable ways, from practical financial and material assistance to providing psychosocial support. The Episcopal Church has affirmed the Sustainable Development Goals, and Episcopal Relief & Development, the Church's agency, invests in sustainable development and disaster assistance with a gender lens, and advances evidence based strategies that reduce gender based violence. Episcopalians have addressed gender gaps in church institutions, for example, by providing an online toolkit supporting female clergy applicants and educational scholarships for women and girls and women's seminars.

While celebrating advancements in gender justice, realized in part by and for women and girls, we recognize that slow progress can be accelerated by eradicating poverty, strengthening institutions and financing using a gender lens.

Eradicate Poverty

The 2023 Sustainable Development Goals Summit recognized the reversal of recent global progress to eradicate poverty by 2030. Among other factors, poverty persists because of ideologies, systemic biases and discriminations that disproportionately impact some populations. Women and girls experiencing poverty do not have stable sources of food, shelter, clothing, education, health care, social provisions, social support, access to essential services (electricity, water, internet) and often are plagued by violations of their human rights, insecurity and conflict.

To eradicate poverty, we must respond to its manifestations and reverse its systemic root causes. These include the practical and spiritual failure to care for and respond to the socio-economic plights of others in our societies and complicit tolerance of inequality.

Decision-makers must confront sexism, colonialism, racism, and discrimination as drivers of poverty that have marginalized women and girls for centuries. We declare unacceptable the inequalities and sufferings experienced by Indigenous

women; women of color; women of African descent; women experiencing discrimination for their ethnicity, race, caste, descent, language, religion, sexual orientation, or gender identity/expression; women with disabilities; migrants, refugees, internally displaced, undocumented, or stateless women; rural and geographically isolated women; older and ageing women; widows; women in traditional societal gender roles and women heads of households. Often, they are not consulted on matters affecting them directly. When Episcopalians embraced the call to “leave no one behind” and “reach the furthest behind first” in Agenda 2030, they committed to prioritizing these populations.

Strengthen Institutions

Stakeholders must strengthen and reform institutions to overcome widespread gender gaps. Women are underrepresented and misrepresented in membership, decision-making and leadership, and there is frequently a failure to consider gender-specific needs of women and girls in the consultation, design, operation, control and evaluation of institutions and their infrastructure. These reforms must include adaptations to present and future impacts of climate change for women and girls. Further, lack of awareness and understanding about gender equality and its benefits contributes to ongoing gender discrimination and gender-based violence. Gender equality only will be realized once the whole of society understands its social, economic, and political benefits and undertakes transformation. Finally, sexual and gender-based violence persists as a “shadow pandemic” in its many forms, due in part to lack of awareness about its prevalence, cultural tolerance, systemic discrimination and underreporting. Technology generates and exacerbates new encounters, spaces, and forms of violence against women and girls.

Strengthen Financing

Stakeholders must also strengthen financing using a gender-specific perspective. Women and girls are more likely to be in economically dependent positions without access to economic rights or resources; this is further exacerbated by their inability, in some societies, to purchase and inherit land, property, and businesses. Women in some parts of the world have difficulties accessing capital and banking services without a male co-signer. Women’s programs need greater funding and gender-based analysis in budgeting and financing need to be prioritized. Women and girls often contribute unpaid work to the economy and are therefore under-resourced based on their contributions to family and society.

The Episcopal Church urges member states, the United Nations, civil society, and all people to:

- universally implement international agreements including Agenda 2030, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Beijing Platform for Action, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol;
- research, collect and report scientific evidence using gender-specific indicators and sex-disaggregated data;
- allocate 0.7 per cent of national operating budgets for Sustainable Development Goals;
- develop and implement anti-poverty programs, including employment schemes, that improve access to food for women in poverty, including through appropriate pricing and distribution schemes;

- ensure gender parity and equal access to basic resources, public services, social protections and sustainable infrastructure for women and girls, including education and training, universal health care, maternal and infant health, sexual and reproductive health, family planning and disease prevention, equal access to quality health care regardless of gender, paid family leave, affordable quality child care, pre-school and family support services, and support for single-family households, viable social security systems and safety nets, living wages for all and equal pay for equal work;
- for marginalized women and girls, prioritize financing, resource allocation and provision of social protections, public services, and sustainable infrastructure; promote awareness campaigns concerning their rights and opportunities; prioritize their participation in planning, resource allocation and programs and uphold the Free, Prior and Informed Consent of Indigenous women and girls;
- ensure gender parity in representation in membership, decision-making, hiring and leadership across all institutions; eliminate segregation at work and all forms of discrimination in employment;
- ensure gender-specific needs of women and girls in the consultation, design, operation, control and evaluation of institutions and their infrastructure. This must include attention to climate change and the present and future impacts of climate disasters on women and girls;
- promote and accelerate gender equality education for all, irrespective of sex, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and engage men and boys. Address gender imbalances in meeting basic socio-economic, social, and political needs and promote gender equality education;
- ensure human rights protections, safety, and security for women and girls;
- promote human rights education and awareness and enforce protections locally, nationally and internationally;
- continue multi-stakeholder collaborations and grassroots awareness campaigns to end gender-based violence;
- strengthen regulatory and judicial protections, including for digital spaces and law enforcement, for all women and girls, especially survivors of violence;
- promote economic independence and economic rights of women, and align national laws and policies so that women can purchase and inherit land, property and businesses;
- increase accessibility of capital and microloans for women and marginalized groups, ensure equitable access to banking services without male co-signers;
- increase funding for women's programs and implement gender-based analysis in budgeting and financing;
- acknowledge and celebrate women's and girls' unpaid contributions to the economy;

We must eradicate poverty, strengthen institutions and financing through a gender perspective for all to benefit from gender justice and equality. The Episcopal Church calls upon member states, the United Nations, civil society, and all people to uphold the values, principles, programs and legislation for gender justice and human rights.