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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 Equality Now, 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

Equality Now, an international human rights organization and steering committee member of several coalitions, including as the Secretariat of the Global Campaign for Equality in Family Law and the Solidarity for African Women's Rights Coalition, and a co-founder of the Alliance for Universal Digital Rights (AUDRi) and the Global Campaign for Equal Nationality Rights, calls on all member states at the 68th session of the Commission on the Status of Women to strengthen legal frameworks for gender equality in order to "accelerate the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls by addressing poverty and strengthening institutions and financing with a gender perspective". This is an essential step towards a feminist global economy of well-being which goes beyond GDP and puts "people and planet first".

Only 14 countries according to the World Bank, that's less than 10 per cent, have achieved full legal equality and the United Nations estimates it will take almost 300 years for the rest to catch up. Yet, the law affects virtually every part of a girl and woman's life – education, health, employment, security, citizenship, property inheritance and ownership, marriage and right to divorce. The World Bank in its report, *Women, Business and the Law 2023*, shows clearly that without good laws, related to both the domestic and public spheres, women and girls cannot fully participate in society. This damages women and girls, their families and their communities, and hinders sustainable development.

Sex discrimination in economic status laws, and weak or non-existent constitutional protections, restrict women from being economically independent, by limiting access to inheritance and property ownership (including access to matrimonial property) as well as to employment opportunities and fair parental leave and retirement benefits. This contributes to women's poverty, their household's poverty and their community's poverty. Equality Now's advocacy brief, *Words & Deeds: Sex Discrimination in Economic Status Laws*, includes specific examples of discriminatory laws affecting women's and girls' economic rights. These laws reinforce negative gender stereotypes, including in the care economy, inhibit everyone from living their lives freely on an equal basis. Women also constitute a disproportionate percentage of workers in the informal sector, making them more economically vulnerable and vulnerable to gender-based violence, harmful practices and exploitation, including sexual exploitation in-person or on-line. It also leaves women and girls more vulnerable to crises, including climate change.

In addition to inheritance and marital property laws, discriminatory family laws – addressing the rights of women and men entering into marriage, divorce, custody, guardianship of children, the right of a spouse to choose their profession and occupation, independent of the other – have a severe economic impact on women, girls and their families. Conversely, researchers have found that "egalitarian reform of family law may be the most crucial precondition to empower women economically," benefiting everyone.

Gender stereotypes and the undervaluing of the care economy also result in women's poverty in terms of both time and income, as Oxfam and others have well noted. As the Working Group on Discrimination against Women and Girls has powerfully stated, "Poverty is a gendered phenomenon that is deeply imbricated with other forms of inequality and discrimination," and recommends that States should base all laws and policies, especially in the economic and social spheres, in the core human rights principles of equality and non-discrimination; guarantee gender-responsive and comprehensive social protection; and ensure equal rights to land, housing and property, among other duties.

Digital technology and innovation provide infrastructure for the 21st century and do provide an opportunity for advancing gender equality and addressing poverty. Women, however, are being denied jobs because AI and machine learning have concluded that men usually get them, and so disregard women's applications. AI is also taught gender biases through its use of historical data and then propagates and amplifies them through machine learning into the automated decisions that businesses like insurers and banks are making. This has resulted in decisions where women pay more in premiums and receive less in claim settlements, or are denied credit. The Global Digital Compact to be adopted at the Summit of the Future in September 2024, therefore, must not only address the gender digital divide but must also promote the rights of all women and girls to be free from violence and discrimination in the digital world.

With genuine political will, the revocation of explicitly sex discriminatory laws, the strengthening of constitutional protections, and the adoption of a strong Global Digital Compact can be achieved. We encourage member states at the 68th session of the Commission on the Status of Women therefore to 1) finally repeal or amend all laws, including family laws, that discriminate against women and girls; 2) adopt and enforce constitutional provisions which guarantee sex equality without exception; 3) implement all international legal obligations and SDG5 and related goals to promote gender equality; 4) commit to adopting a progressive Global Digital Compact.
