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peace for the twenty-first century”

Statement submitted by Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women (ARROW), 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

We welcome the priority theme of the 68th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women on accelerating the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in all their diversities by addressing poverty and strengthening institutions and financing with a gender perspective.

Gender inequality is a serious threat to the achievement of sustainable development goals and other commitments including the Beijing declaration and Platform for Action, and poverty has been a significant effect, catalyst and cause of the situation, often faceted in dimensions of poor access to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), increased burden of reproductive and care labour upon women as well as child, early and forced marriages. Systemic issues such as inequality under law, social marginalisation and lack of sexual and reproductive health care are the biggest barriers to any country's development. One key solution is gender-responsive budgeting, which should become the norm worldwide. The primary source of funding for healthcare services, including sexual and reproductive health, should be included in the public health budgets, not just in the private sector resources. ARROW's research in the Asia-Pacific region has shown that privatisation, especially in the health sector, has led to greater out-of-pocket expenses for health services, not to savings. (Financing Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights to realise Sustainable Development for Women and Girls, 2015)

Gender and poverty are interconnected. ARROW's research in the Asia-Pacific region has shown that we are acutely aware of the multifaceted challenges faced by women and girls, many of whom continue to grapple with systemic poverty and multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination. Women and girls are disproportionately affected by poverty due to unequal access to resources, education, and employment opportunities. When women have an income of their own in a country, evidence shows that the poverty rates are lower in that country. Major trends in recent decades include a rise in women's employment rates in large parts of the world, perhaps with the exception of South Asia, and declines in absolute poverty rates and global income inequality. (Gender Equality Intrinsically Linked, 2018)

SRHR has a direct impact on economic growth and development. women and girls in all their diversities have a greater chance of higher education by choosing to delay their marriage, pregnancy and make other important informed decisions that affect themselves, their health and well-being and ultimately their economic conditions. This provides better opportunities for better jobs, access to more resources and the whole community benefits. Sexual and reproductive rights are critical if the new development agenda is to 'leave no one behind'.

Furthermore, the practice of child, early and forced marriages undeniably perpetuates patriarchy and the life cycle of poverty, further marginalising girls and exacerbating their vulnerability, particularly those in rural, humanitarian, emergency and crisis settings. It has far-reaching economic consequences, restricting people's control over and access to economic assets and productive resources. Girls forced into early marriages are prevented from forming social networks and accessing education, and they suffer from severe health and nutritional consequences. It is essential to recognise that child, early and forced marriages involve a lack of free, full, and informed consent; it limits bodily autonomy and deprives girls of the enjoyment of their rights including their sexual and reproductive health and rights. (Thematic Paper on Ending Child Early and Forced Marriage, ARROW, 2017) And hence, women and girls in all their diversities are naturally pushed into the vicious cycle of poverty, forcing them to consider survival instincts of highest priority and restricting their

participation in decision making and accountability mechanisms, ultimately affecting the architecture of financing.

Additionally, we must recognize the disproportionate burden of unpaid reproductive labour and care work carried by women and girls in all their diversities in the Asia and Pacific region. They work the longest hours in the world, with a substantial portion (4.4 hours out of 7.7 hours) dedicated to unpaid reproductive labour and care work. This includes activities such as childbearing and rearing, cooking, cleaning, washing, caring for the elderly, the sick, and the disabled. Reproductive labour and care work involve both physical and mental exertion and consume significant time and energy. It is essential to acknowledge that women and girls in all their diversities often perform these tasks out of societal expectations and gendered power dynamics, yet they remain unrecognised and uncompensated. The lack of recognition and compensation for reproductive labour and care work, and the redistribution of the care burden to the Global South, giving rise to “global care chains” perpetuates the economic subjugation of women at the micro level and contributes to the feminisation of poverty at the macro level. Furthermore, it reinforces racial, ethnic, caste, and economic subordination by undervaluing reproductive labour. (ARROW For Change: Reproductive Rights, ARROW, 2023)

The landscape of development aid is rapidly changing, cutbacks have raised extreme concerns among women’s rights organisations and young people led organisations dedicated to gender equality. The pursuit of the right to development, including SRHR, demands consistent financing and long-term support from national governments and the international development community. However, the withdrawal from aid commitments by financial supporters of public causes and the growing privatisation of healthcare have forced us to reconsider our approach. The economic crisis further complicates this context. (Repoliticising Financing: Re-energising Political Support for Women’s Health and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, ARROW, 2011)

Pertaining to the degrading situation of gender equality globally, we recommend the following actions to be considered with utmost importance:

We recommend meaningful political participation of women and girls throughout policy making and budget cycle including defining the architecture of financing and budgeting.

Realising a multidimensional perspective on poverty necessitates addressing not only economic concerns but also environmental sustainability and social dimensions on the basis of equity, equality, and justice. These dimensions include youth leadership and empowerment, gender equality, health, education, freedom from violence, access to information and technology, and human rights – including those of young people and women in all their diversities. (Asia-Pacific Youth Call to Action, ARROW, 2017)

It is important that states address the difficult political process of challenging the layers of discrimination that keep women, young girls and young people trapped in poverty, including addressing the human rights of women with disabilities, indigenous persons, people of diverse sexual orientation and gender identity, and stateless people, amongst other marginalised groups.

Reproductive labour and care work involve both physical and mental exertion and consume significant time and energy. It is important to reimagine the institutions of financing to recognise, reduce, meaningfully combat and compensate for the burden.

States, donor organisations, and other actors should invest in robust data collection and monitoring systems to track progress in addressing poverty, gender

inequality, and sexual and reproductive health and rights. Transparent and reliable data is essential for evidence-based policymaking and establishing accountability mechanisms that witness meaningful and inclusive participation of women, girls and young people.

By adopting a comprehensive approach that addresses poverty, strengthens institutions, ensures financing with a gender perspective, recognises, reduces and redistributes unpaid reproductive labour and care work, and upholds sexual and reproductive health and rights, we can make meaningful progress towards gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in all their diversity.

Our governments and international development actors should not shy away from their primary responsibility of peoples' well-being and overall development. The private sector should be welcomed only to complement public support, not to replace it. In the health sector, when the private sector is mandated with supporting public health care needs, it needs to uphold international quality of care standards and provide the full range of sexual and reproductive health services.

To ensure that the private sector functions within international human rights principles, governments should establish a regulatory framework and accountability mechanisms that are responsive to variables in age, income status, disability, migratory status, and are gender-responsive. Regulations should also apply to international and private for-profit players to ensure that their work helps eliminate inequities.
