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**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and
to the special session of the General Assembly entitled
“Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace
for the twenty-first century”: implementation of strategic
objectives and action in critical areas of concern and
further actions and initiatives**

Statement submitted by International Federation of Women in Legal Careers, 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.



Statement

The International Federation of Women in Legal Careers has analysed the priority theme of the fifty-seventh session of the Commission on the Status of Women, namely, the elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls, as well as its review theme of the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS.

The Federation considers that today's world is worn out by the numerous conflicts and wars, which are the result of the inequalities of wealth division and the exploitation of natural resources, increase economic and social inequality both between and inside countries, gravely injure human rights and generate poverty and social conflicts.

Poverty affects millions of women, reinforces discrimination and increases their vulnerability and risk of suffering all kinds of violence, from domestic and family abuse to sexual and labour exploitation.

The Federation considers that gender equality continues to be the main human rights issue in today's world and that the promotion and respect of women's human rights, equality, peace and development are indivisible and mutually reinforced values.

The Federation reaffirms that the total eradication of all discrimination towards women and their full participation in all decision-making process is essential in order to attain the Millennium Development Goals.

It therefore exhorts Governments, all political authorities and all those who have responsibilities in decision-making bodies not to limit themselves to making simple proclamations of adhesion to the Millennium Development Goals, but instead to dare to put into practice policies that effectively accomplish the Goals and establish equality, peace and development.

The Federation considers that violence against women and girls starts with discrimination against women, and considers it as a flagrant violation of human rights.

The Federation considers that breaking the cycle of violence against women is not a specific problem for women, but a question of human rights that needs an equal effort from both men and women and all national and international jurisdictions.

The Federation supports the persistence of the fact, recognized in 1995 by the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, that in countries with economical adjustment programmes, including the privatization of public services and the reduction of social programmes, women are responsible for new obligations to avoid the effects of the reduction of public social budgets on their own families.

The Federation believes that it is indispensable to integrate a gender perspective in the evaluation of economic and social politics, namely, by the adoption of gender-sensitive budgets, in order to make women fully participate in all economic, social and political decisions, and consequently achieve the real and effective empowerment of women.

The Federation regards as fundamental for all Governments, as well as national and international economical and financial institutions, to review the procedure for national accounting in order to recognize and account for the economic value of women's contribution to wealth production by way of their non-remunerated labour, especially domestic and family work.

The Federation wants to reaffirm its commitment to the edification of a new paradigm for the social and legal organization of respect for human dignity and the promotion of women's human rights.

The Federation emphasizes the importance of international juridical instruments for human rights, namely, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

The Federation exhorts States parties to the above-mentioned Convention to direct the competent executive, legislative and judicial authorities to take all necessary means and to allocate adequate budgetary resources to effectively start the promotion and protection of the rights of women.

The Federation thinks that the need to empower women should also be highlighted in the two International Covenants, mainstreaming the traditional roles of women, showing clearly the universal understanding that sexual and reproductive rights are fundamental and universal human rights.

The Federation therefore considers that the international community should adopt a new optional protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, on the fundamental right to equality of men and women on the exercise of family responsibilities.

States parties to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights should also agree on a new optional protocol on the fundamental right to care, the fundamental and equal duty of men and women to take care of dependants and the fundamental right to the recognition by society and by the State of the imminent social value of unpaid work to support family life, equally shared between women and men.

The Federation appeals to all States to effectively engage in the accomplishment of the mandate of the International Criminal Court.

The Federation thinks that, within the mandate of the International Criminal Court, those acts of an economic or financial nature whose aims and impacts directly, necessarily and gravely affect economic and social fundamental rights should be criminalized, and considers that corporations and collective persons who are authors of economical aggression leading to war should be criminally responsible for their acts.

The Federation thinks that it is essential for all States to implement national action plans to put into practice Security Council resolution 1325 (2000).

The Federation considers all legal texts of international humanitarian law should be interpreted and applied with a gender perspective, meaning that the different impact that wars have upon women and men should be taken into consideration, in order to reduce the grade of violence against women.

The Federation considers that it is necessary to elaborate integral laws on the status of women, so as to facilitate the knowledge, widespread dissemination and effective application of egalitarian and anti-discriminatory legislation by the courts.

The progress made during the past several years regarding the adoption of adequate legislation to prevent and punish violence against women, especially violence inside the family, is not yet sufficient, due to the absence of adequate resources and political will.

The Federation considers the education of women and girls to be the most powerful tool to obtain the empowerment of women and gender equality. It considers essential that equality values should be taught from childhood in every school. It therefore thinks that sexism and all kind of stereotypes related to the traditional roles of women and men and gender bias should be eradicated from all educational programmes.

The Federation thinks that all States should take all appropriate measures to guarantee that all professors at all educational levels receive instruction on women's human rights, equality and, in the countries with strong immigration, knowledge of the different cultures.

The Federation considers that all States should take all appropriate measures to guarantee mandatory school attendance for girls, especially in cases of pregnancy, AIDS or extreme poverty.

The Federation wants to express its deep distress with the traditional or customary practices against the girl child, especially female genital mutilation and cutting, stressing that those practices are an act of violence against girls and a violation of their fundamental rights to life, security, freedom and health.

The Federation considers such practices to be a violation of human rights and that they should be typified as crimes against humanity and be the subject of massive campaigns of information and enlightenment, in order to persuade parents not to engage their daughters in such customs.

The Federation believes that abortion without proper security is a humanitarian disaster that is made worse through its criminalization, which is a clear violation of women's human rights and does not necessarily diminish its frequency. On the contrary, criminalization forces women to pay with their lives the interruption of an unwanted pregnancy. Consequently, it advocates for free access to reproductive health services, including the "morning after" pill and safe abortion, as well as for the criminalization of the deliberate spreading of HIV/AIDS.