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Statement submitted by Women’s Intercultural Network, 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 Women's Intercultural Network, along with our partners, applaud the Commission on the Status of Women for giving us an opportunity at the fifty-eighth session to address the ongoing efforts to implement the Millennium Development Goals, especially in the areas of advancement for women and girls. Our mission is to ensure that all women and girls have a voice in their Government and the economy. It is also critical that those voices be heard in planning for what will replace the Millennium Development Goals after 2015.

As of 2013, progress towards the Millennium Development Goals was uneven. Some countries achieved many goals, while others were not on track to realize any. Only Goals 3 and 5 of the eight Goals concern promoting gender equality and empowering women and girls, and improving maternal health. For example, African women still face significant barriers in starting a business, accessing an education and participating in politics. African women bear the burden of unpaid work, as many of them do not receive a formal wage. Sub-Saharan Africa also has the world's second-largest gender gap in primary school enrolment (91 girls per 100 boys) and the largest in secondary school enrolment (79 per 100). On the political front, some progress has been made in increasing women's representation in political bodies. In seven African countries, women now hold 30 per cent or more of the seats in their national parliaments. The Gambia, Lesotho and Rwanda are making significant progress towards Goal 3. Yet in regard to Goal 5 on maternal health, sub-Saharan Africa has registered very little progress in recent years. New statistics show that every year, 190,000 women die during pregnancy and childbirth in sub-Saharan Africa. An African woman is more than 200 times more likely than a woman in the United States to die in childbirth, and only half of all women in Africa have access to a skilled birth attendant. These examples demonstrate that despite success in some areas, there is also need for improvement in achieving Goals 3 and 5.

The High-level Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly on the Millennium Development Goals, held in September 2010, reviewed progress and concluded with the adoption of a global plan to achieve the eight goals by their target date (General Assembly resolution [65/1](#)). New commitments were made towards women's and children's health and new initiatives in the worldwide battle against poverty, hunger and disease.

These commitments included achieving gender equality by improving access to education and thus contributing to the overall socioeconomic well-being and health of women. According to a recent Millennium Development Goals Report, new initiatives led to some improvements in girls' access to primary education. In Eastern and Central Asia and Latin America, however, girls still face disproportionate discrimination in higher education. Although the gender gap in school enrolment has improved from 14.4 million girls out of school to 4.1 million worldwide, the numbers have stagnated since 2008. These changes unquestionably reflect women's contribution to the economic growth of countries. Regions that nearly reached the Millennium Development Goals in gender parity in wage labour, such as Eastern Asia, the Caucasus, Central Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, were also on target for parity in educational attainment. Regions that registered the greatest progress in education also scored higher in gender parity in the labour force compared to other regions.

But it is disconcerting to acknowledge that progress has been slow and that there are still barriers to women's and girls' full participation in their societies. There are a few common barriers across countries, including: poor starting conditions in underdeveloped States, weak governance and institutions riddled with corruption, conflict and instability, and environmental degradation.

Accounting for the contribution of women and girls to world economies needs to become a priority of all developing and developed countries, until women have more secure jobs with decent wages and career advancement opportunities everywhere. At this moment, we have to recognize that Millennium Development Goals 3 and 5 will not be met by 2015.

Yet, behind the targets is the commitment of Member States to promote gender-inclusive policies and practices. In this regard, it is of great concern that the Millennium Development Goals have not been fully embraced by the Government of the United States, although the goals have been embraced by the country: non-governmental organizations strive daily to support programmes and policy initiatives aimed at improving the status of women. The Government has been peripheral in enforcing the advancement of gender equality worldwide. Its failure to track data relating to gender equality demonstrates that this issue is not a priority. In addition, aid donations by the United States have fallen behind those of other donor countries. The United States lacks a comprehensive strategy to support long-term development assistance goals and, above all, financial aid has been focused on military spending and national security. Therefore, as a world leader, the United States needs to include the Millennium Development Goals, in addition to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, in its official agenda and recognize the importance of these documents in furthering the status of women, locally and worldwide.

Promoting gender equality means creating economic and social conditions that are responsive to women's concerns by implementing policies that build platforms for self-representation. Such initiatives need to take into account the cultural dimensions of the policies. In the United States women need to make a leap towards greater representation in local, state and national governments. According to the Human Development Index for 2011, women make up only 17 per cent of representatives in the United States Government. In short, we need to advocate for strategies that address inherent inequalities in power dynamics and within societal structures. Gender equality is not only a concern of developing countries, but also of developed countries such as the United States. Global sustainable development is only possible when women and men enjoy equal opportunities and their potential can be realized worldwide.

Recommendations for the implementation of Millennium Development Goals 3 and 5

To achieve successful implementation of Millennium Development Goals 3 and 5, we must acknowledge that structural change begins at the grass roots. Thus, global initiatives to eradicate poverty need to incorporate grass-roots voices in order to strengthen women's advocacy worldwide. This can be achieved by involving non-governmental organizations dedicated to women's advancement and maternal health, since they are working on the ground in all Member States. The present recommendations support the idea of building local movements and empowering

local communities from within. Urgent efforts are also needed to ensure that minority and indigenous women and girls are not excluded from gains in the Millennium Development Goals, as they are very vulnerable populations.

Is the United Nations now taking these measures seriously, realizing that many Member States are far from achieving Millennium Development Goals 3 and 5? On 18 October 2013, the Security Council, desiring to accelerate action on the implementation of its resolution [1325 \(2000\)](#) on women, peace and security, issued a strong call to the international community to strengthen its commitment to ensuring that women play a more prominent role in conflict prevention and resolution and in post-war peacebuilding by unanimously adopting resolution [2122 \(2013\)](#). It also urged full and meaningful participation in peace and security issues, and committed to increase focus on women's adequate access to justice in conflict and post-conflict settings. We applaud this movement forward. Women must be involved at every stage of efforts to reassert the rule of law and rebuild societies through transitional justice. Their needs for security and justice must be addressed. Their voices must be heard. Their rights must be protected.

One of the most rapid ways to empower women in peace and conflict zones — and thereby remove one of the chief barriers to successfully achieving Millennium Development Goals 3 and 5 — begins with women in the grass roots in these zones. The annual meetings organized by the NGO Committee on the Status of Women are as crucial as the annual sessions of the Commission on the Status of Women as they connect grass-roots women working towards the betterment of women's lives and bring grass-roots efforts to an arena where they are matched with policy.
