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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 World Young Women’s Christian Association, 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 World Young Women's Christian Association is a global women's rights movement reaching 25 million women, young women and girls in over 120 countries. We advocate for peace, justice, human rights and care for the environment. Our association has been at the forefront of raising the status of women for over a century and recognizes that their status now stands at a critical juncture. The Millennium Development Goals, which have dominated the global development agenda for the past 15 years, expire in 2015, creating a unique opportunity to advance women's rights and gender equality. The present statement is based on consultations with young women and Young Women's Christian Associations around the world on the theme of the fifty-eighth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, "Challenges and achievements in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls".

In the lead-up to the Millennium Development Goals deadline, progress reports show encouraging achievements: a significant reduction in the number of people living on less than \$1.25 a day (from 2 billion to 1.4 billion), indicating that Millennium Development Goal 1 could be achieved ahead of its deadline. However, there have also been disappointing setbacks: extreme poverty remains a reality for over 1 billion people, mostly women and girls. Regarding goal 2, advances have been made towards gender parity in primary education, although more girls still remain out of school than boys and 100 per cent primary school attendance has not been reached. Goal 3 has seen progress in the percentage of women in parliament, but the pace of change is slow at an important moment when women's participation in decision-making is critical in defining the future development agenda. Achievements in goal 6, declines in global malaria deaths and increased access to treatment for people living with HIV in all regions, are commendable, but HIV infection remains the leading cause of death of women of reproductive age.

Gender inequality globally continues to undermine efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, resulting in continuing challenges to ending violence against women and girls, securing sexual and reproductive health and rights, and leveraging women's contribution to world economies. These issues must be given greater priority in the final push towards 2015 and in the post-2015 development agenda.

We believe that it is also imperative that the new development agenda be inclusive of the voices of the world's young women, who are among those most vulnerable to poverty, hunger and poor health outcomes. The post-2015 development agenda must capture the needs, assets and aspirations of this critical population group if progress is to be achieved.

Young women from 18 to 30 years of age constituted 860 million of the world's population in 2010. We call on the Commission to recognize that young women have an important role to play in development. They are a vital part of the 1 billion people entering the labour market this decade; they are the future mothers who can transform families; and they have enormous human capital that can be used to change the course of their communities. Young women must be recognized as a critical group in achieving development and not absorbed into generic approaches to development.

In order to promote a better future for young women, it is essential to address their childhood experiences. In Africa, an estimated 928 million girls aged 10 years

or older have undergone genital mutilation and over 609 million girls, mainly in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, are married before the age of 18. An estimated 150 million girls under 18 suffer some form of sexual violence in any given year. Violence breeds emotional insecurity, poor health outcomes and dysfunctional social relationships, weakens confidence and the ability to contribute to community life, diminishes productivity and reduces the ability to achieve economic independence. We call on the Commission to promote a dramatic societal shift in the lives of girls so that young women can achieve their full potential.

The World Young Women's Christian Association calls attention to what the International Labour Organization (ILO), in its report *Global Employment Trends for Youth* for 2010, calls the "lost generation": young people, both men and women, who have detached themselves completely from the labour market, having lost all hope of being able to work for a decent living. Economic independence cannot be achieved if young women are subjected to sexual harassment and abuse in the workplace and continue to earn, according to ILO, 70-90 per cent of their male counterparts' wages, despite increasing educational levels. Corrupt practices, impunity for lawbreakers, inadequate enforcement of laws, high interest rates and discrimination on the grounds of maternity also exacerbate young women's economic vulnerability. Communities can thrive only if young women are able to access decent employment and wages, as well as fair working conditions.

The World Young Women's Christian Association would like to call attention to the fact that violence against women, young women and girls is intricately linked with their sexual and reproductive health and rights. Acts of sexual violence are a direct attack on sexual rights, impacting both physical and mental health. Likewise, without access to confidential and evidence-based sexual and reproductive health information and services, young women remain vulnerable to unwanted pregnancies, unsafe abortions and sexually transmitted infections. Every minute a young woman is newly infected with HIV. Harmful traditional practices, including female genital mutilation and early and forced marriage, are also forms of violence that deny girls' and young women's sexual and reproductive rights, limit their education and increase their vulnerability to violence.

In response to the unfinished business of the Millennium Development Goals, the World Young Women's Christian Association has consulted with young women and Associations worldwide to define the future young women want, which must be based on an overall framework that ensures and prioritizes:

- (a) A human rights-based approach: human rights principles must be embedded in any international, regional and national framework in order to ensure that development respects, protects and fulfils the human rights of all;
- (b) Mainstreaming gender across all development goals and targets, ensuring that data are disaggregated by age and sex, with common global indicators and nationally set targets to enable real progress in young women's lives that is not skewed by varying demographics;
- (c) An integrated approach with other global review processes, including the 20-year reviews of the Beijing Platform for Action and the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and with the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, as well as respect for existing international obligations as enshrined in the Convention on the

Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) to ensure that resources are maximized and coordinated;

(d) Accountability, monitoring and evaluation of future goals and targets with processes that strengthen national ownership, increase results and improve resource allocations across the comprehensive agenda, and promote partnerships among Governments, civil society and the private sector.

To ensure this future, the World Young Women's Christian Association puts forward the following recommendations for the review of the progress of the Millennium Development Goals and for priorities for the post-2015 development agenda:

(a) Retain gender equality as a primary goal in the new agenda with accelerated efforts and expanded resources to eliminate persistent gender inequalities and discrimination;

(b) By 2030, the United Nations and Member States must mobilize to:

(i) End violence against women, young women and girls by:

a. Preventing all forms of violence against women, young women and girls, especially in times of heightened conflict, by ensuring zero tolerance and an end to impunity for perpetrators;

b. Eradicating early and forced marriage, female genital mutilation and other harmful traditional practices;

c. Providing support services and remedies for survivors of violence, including housing, health, legal and counselling services and targeted education initiatives to ensure that victims are treated with dignity and respect;

d. Redefining "masculinity" and promoting increased participation of men and boys in violence prevention and achieving gender equality;

(ii) Fulfil sexual reproductive health and rights, ensuring:

a. Comprehensive and age-appropriate sexuality education for all young people in and out of school;

b. Universal and equitable access to sexual and reproductive health services and family planning for women so that they can make informed decisions about their bodies;

c. Universal and equitable access to effective and voluntary HIV prevention, treatment, care and support services;

(iii) Ensure the meaningful participation of young women, including:

a. Safe spaces for the participation and leadership of young women, including vulnerable groups, in decisions impacting their lives at all levels and in all sectors;

b. Access to information and services that enable young women to exercise their civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights;

- c. Engaging young women and young men in peacebuilding processes;
 - d. Targeting adequate resources and political will at the overall development of young women;
- (iv) Ensure access to education, economic empowerment and resources, including:
- a. Full enrolment and participation of girls and boys in quality primary and secondary education;
 - b. Equal access to vocational skills, employment and entrepreneurial opportunities for all young people to ensure a successful transition from education to decent work;
 - c. Equal access to control and ownership of land, property and assets;
 - d. Leadership in efforts towards building peaceful, sustainable and resilient communities, mitigating climate change and ensuring climate justice.
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