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Statement submitted by Zonta International, 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

Challenges and achievements in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls

Zonta International has supported the Millennium Development Goals through its relationships with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). Through these agencies, we have funded programmes in several countries to help eliminate violence against women, prevent the transmission of HIV/AIDS from mother to child in Rwanda and help women in Liberia overcome the devastation of obstetric fistula, to name just a few. Many of these projects also provide women with livelihood training to empower them economically to live healthy and productive lives when they return to their communities.

This year, we instituted a worldwide advocacy project, "Zonta says NO to violence against women", to which our 30,000 members are dedicated. Through this initiative, actions to raise awareness of violence against women and girls will take place in 65 countries around the globe.

We are steadfast in our commitment to women's and girls' equality and empowerment. It is evident that within the Millennium Development Goals, the goals that are not likely to be reached are those that rely on achieving women's equality and empowerment. Taken as a whole, the Millennium Development Goals are missing important components that would have achieved full human rights for women and girls around the world.

We therefore find ourselves at a crucial point, when we must realize that the time has come to put women's equality and empowerment at the forefront of our goals. It is widely recognized that empowering women and giving them equal opportunity reaps rewards for families, communities, countries and the world. The Commission on the Status of Women must seize the opportunity before it is lost. We know that gender inequality is a major challenge across all sectors, but it is one that must be addressed. The opportunity to impact the post-2015 agenda should not be lost. We therefore offer our assessment of targets that, although ambitious, must be achieved.

As outlined by UN-Women in its report "A transformative stand-alone goal on achieving gender equality, women's rights and women's empowerment: imperatives and key components", a stand-alone goal for post-2015 should have three targets: freedom from violence against women and girls; gender equality in capabilities and resources; and gender equality in decision-making power in public and private institutions. Including these three target areas will ensure that progress will be monitored, through disaggregated statistics.

In the formulation of new goals, gender concerns, specifically gender equality, should be mainstreamed throughout. The reasoning is that the stand-alone goal, including women's and girls' equality, rights and empowerment, will cover other critical issues such as maternal mortality. Mortality rates are still unacceptably high. We have the medical knowledge to lower these rates and Governments should be held accountable when women die in childbirth who could have been saved.

Preventing and eliminating violence against women and girls should be a primary concern. Such violence is an abuse of the human rights of both women and girls. Today, statistics show that one of every three women will be a victim of violence in her lifetime. Owing to cultural factors or so-called traditional values, women are subjected to untold harm without any recourse. Full implementation of the United Nations Millennium Declaration, the Beijing Platform for Action and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women will go far in preventing violence against women and girls.

The rights of women to own and inherit property, to own their own businesses and to enter into contracts should be upheld. There must be a human rights-based approach to achieving equality for women in the sphere of economics. They should also be recognized for the unpaid work they perform and given the opportunity to be employed in decent jobs at decent wages.

Women and girls should have access to justice. While all people are entitled to justice, women and girls are often unaware of their rights and significant barriers are put in their way in seeking to exercise those rights. Cultural as well as institutional barriers must be traversed so that women's human rights are not trampled upon. Gender-friendly police and courts are important. More women should be recruited to serve as police officers; this is crucial, as women and girls who are victims of violence have very specific needs, which must be met.

Reports on the Millennium Development Goals have shown that the number of people living in poverty has fallen, but the figures do not take into account that 70 per cent of the world's poor are women. To make this disproportionate situation even worse, women who are employed very often have less job security and benefits.

Women must have decision-making power at all levels,. Whether the decisions are political, economic, health-related or educational, they must have the power to be part of the process. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that everyone has the right to take part in the government of his or her country (art. 21). Women have been left out of the parliaments and councils of many countries so that their knowledge and abilities are ignored.

Another area of concern has to do with the environment and natural disasters. Women suffer the most devastation during times of natural disaster. Women are looked upon only as victims. This short-sightedness overlooks the value of their assistance and knowledge when it comes to addressing environmental impacts.

When we realize that there is much to be done, we cannot help but feel that this is the time to roll up our sleeves and accomplish the goals we have adopted. If we wish to build a sustainable world where we can all live in peace, women and girls must be on an equal level with men and boys and allowed to make decisions and judgments for their own well-being and that of the world's people. We urge the Commission to stand fast when entering into negotiations. The women and girls of the world depend on its leadership.