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to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly
entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and
peace for the twenty-first century”**

Statement submitted by Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation, 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

Empowering women lies at the heart of true social change, and is crucial in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. The Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation was conceived as a means to simultaneously uplift those in poverty and inspire general society to help those in need. Founded in 1966, Tzu Chi began with only 30 housewives donating 50 cents a day of their daily budget. Since then, Tzu Chi has grown into a core international volunteer force of 60,000 people, the majority of whom are women over the age of 40. While Tzu Chi's mission is to help all those in need regardless of race, sex, or religion, it also has projects that specifically focus on girls and women. With regards to the empowerment of women in a changing world of work, the following statement seeks to reinforce the concept that women are at the heart of daily social change, and provide recommendations to the commission based on Tzu Chi's successes in providing holistic education, creating vocational training opportunities, and inspiring grassroots action in local communities.

Education for Global Citizenship

In a world where education is the pathway to job opportunities and proper societal participation, it is imperative that the global community addresses the cycle of neglect perpetuated by inadequate education. If there is to be social progress and advancement of economic growth, there must be a focus on quality education, but moreover, women must have equal access to education that empowers them to be global citizens, citizens that carry the knowledge of our common humanity and shared responsibility to take care of one another out of a sense of interconnectedness.

Falling in line with the Sustainable Development Goals, Tzu Chi built schools to increase access for individuals to receive quality education for little to no cost, seeking to close the inequality gap and uplifting marginalized communities.

In order to achieve true social change in the workplace, access to quality education and education for global citizenship must be at the foundation of Agenda 2030. To leave no one behind requires an acknowledgment that there are those who are indeed left behind, that there are those who are 'othered,' and thus dehumanized. We must recognize the interconnectedness of our actions, a mentality cultivated through education for global citizenship.

Vocational Training

Although education is a catalyst for social involvement, independence, empowerment, and education without partnership will not translate into greater opportunity, and thus failing to create actual change, further perpetuating gender inequality.

After Hurricane Yolanda, the devastated city of Palo, Leyte received humanitarian aid from Tzu Chi. Following the relief efforts, a "Great Love Village", a 260-unit family housing community, was built. Recognizing the need for women to have the opportunity to work, Tzu Chi partnered with the local Palo government and private businesses to provide employment opportunities for women who

received vocational training. From sewing to baking, each vocational skill allowed for women to be placed into local job opportunities, strengthening the local job infrastructure. Through training women in vocational skills, and working closely with local partners on the ground, Tzu Chi ensures that there can be decent work opportunities and economic growth.

Inspiring Grassroots Action in Local Communities

Meaningful progress can only be possible with long term, self-sustaining programs. By inspiring grassroots action, especially among women and girls, local communities will take a leading role in their own empowerment and progress, ensuring inclusiveness, participation, and representation at all levels of decision-making, a concept that Tzu Chi believes to be at the heart of Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions.

Tzu Chi's seed and wheat distribution program in Lesotho began in 2004 with a focus on leveraging the need for food security in the country. Inspiring the local aid recipients, Tzu Chi taught the farmers the importance of giving to those less fortunate, even when you yourself have so little. From the initial 5 volunteers that distributed seeds, over 2000 farmers now donate a portion of their crop back to Tzu Chi to distribute to those less fortunate. This cycle of love not only alleviates hunger in the short term, but empowers the community to strive towards reducing the inequality gap in what is not only a self-sustaining practice, but a compassionate one was well, building a more sustainable and equitable community.

Recommendations

Tzu Chi recognizes that empowering women from the grassroots level is a key contributor towards creating sustainable solutions in a changing world of work. The following recommendations towards Member States, United Nations Agencies and the international community were determined from Tzu Chi's lens of work in tackling the global challenge of uplifting and empowering women in a changing world of work.

1. Tzu Chi calls upon civil society to continue to support the implementation of education for global citizenship as a means of creating individuals empowered to face the changing world of work.
2. Tzu Chi calls upon Member States to incentivize private sector and non-governmental organizations to collaborate together on creating vocational training, and job placement opportunities for vulnerable populations.
3. Tzu Chi calls upon United Nations agencies to ensure access to quality education in post disaster conditions, working closely with local community leaders and non-governmental organizations to build quality education infrastructure.