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**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and 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 Plan 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.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

A. About Plan International

Founded in 1937, Plan International is a development and humanitarian organization that advances children's rights and equality for girls. We encourage empowering children, young people, and communities to make vital changes that tackle the root causes of discrimination against girls, exclusion, and vulnerability; driving change in practice and policy at local, national and global levels; and supporting the safe and successful progression of all girls and boys from birth to adulthood. We work to ensure that girls and boys know their rights, and have the skills, knowledge, and confidence to fulfil them. Plan International has held special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council since 2011.

Plan International welcomes the priority theme of the 61st Commission on the Status of Women, "Women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work." However, Plan International stresses that a holistic and life cycle approach is essential to the promotion of women's economic empowerment. Our extensive research shows that girls continue to be the single most excluded group in the world. Girls and young women are often denied their rights to: education, engaging actively and equally in society, access to resources including property ownership and inheritance rights, taking important decisions about their futures and bodies, justice and equal opportunities, and protection from gender based violence, including economic violence.

B. Recommendations:

Enabling environments required to promote women's economic empowerment are critical from very early in life. Harmful and discriminatory gender norms and stereotypes, unequal inheritance rights, lack of access to financial services and literacy, the burden of unpaid labour, and lower rates of completion of quality, inclusive education that adequately prepare girls and young women for a successful transition to adulthood are just a few of the barriers that girls more acutely and routinely face which contribute to continued economic inequalities.

Girls and young women make up the majority of the world's 628 million unemployed young people who have neither an education nor vocational training. In many countries, girls' jobs are often vulnerable, informal, and unprotected. Girls are more likely to be paid lower wages — if they are paid at all — and are the first to lose their jobs.

Economic empowerment can be a critical lever for change for girls and young women — helping them to gain financial independence, establish financial literacy and good savings habits, and improve their future prospects for participation in the labour market. It can also increase their mobility, promote their confidence, and improve their health outcomes, contributing to preventing the transmission of poverty from one generation to the next, and to overall economic growth and prosperity.

The creation of decent jobs and reducing the number of young people who are not in employment, education or training is part of Agenda 2030. The Agenda also includes a commitment to gender equality, calling for an end to all forms of

discrimination against girls and women, the elimination of gender-based violence, the recognition of unpaid care and domestic work, and the enhancement of the use of technology to promote the empowerment of women.

It is crucial that the 61st session of the Commission on the Status of Women recognizes and urges Member States to acknowledge and promote the necessity of addressing women's economic empowerment with a holistic and life cycle approach. This necessitates including girls' voices, realities, and participation in this important conversation in order to ensure true gender equality and economic empowerment.

The Commission should:

Reaffirm and urge Member States to prioritize the promotion, protection, and full realization of the human rights of all girls and young women, and the central role of the fulfilment of girls' human rights and empowerment in achieving gender equality and global progress. Rights are compromised if people do not have the resources required to meet their fundamental needs. The social and economic rights of girls and young women are legally protected by the Convention of the Rights of the Child, and the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women, and other International Human Rights instruments such as the many International Labour Organisation Conventions. In addition, the Sustainable Development Goals reaffirm that gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment are essential to sustainable development.

Promote urgent measures to address root causes of gender inequality, which manifest in pervasive and discriminatory gender norms and stereotypes and hinder girls' and women's economic empowerment. In many countries, women face the cumulative effects of multiple legal, social and gender-related constraints, exacerbated by situations of unrest or conflict adding to mobility restrictions due to lack of security/safety or appropriate public transport. Evidence also highlights girls' and young women's heightened vulnerabilities in times of economic stress.

Reform discriminatory legislation, policies and practices which foster gender inequality. This includes amending laws to eliminate discrimination and harassment in the workplace, ensure equal pay for equal work and ensure equality of control of economic and productive resources (including property ownership and inheritance rights), financial services, including credit, loans and bank accounts. Discriminatory legal frameworks and social practices, further compounded by biases based on ethnicity, religion, disability, and sexual orientation, may restrict the possibility for girls and women to obtain identification cards; travel on their own; enter traditionally male professions, conduct official transactions; own or use property; get a waged job or secure credit.

Urge Member States to take all necessary measures to ensure that all girls have access to and complete inclusive and quality pre-primary, primary and secondary education. Structural, financial, and legal barriers girls and women face in completing school and accessing training, prevents them from becoming adequately prepared to enter the labour market and obtain quality and productive work of their choosing. Analysts agree that economic returns on girls' education are substantial, particularly in developing countries. Each extra year of secondary education boosts

a girl's wages by 10-20 percent. In addition, women are more likely to invest their incomes in keeping their children healthy, secure, and educated.

Urge governments to adopt coherent, gender-sensitive, competency-based, accredited training frameworks that align with labour market demand. Governments should education and skill development schemes towards a gender-equitable — occupational stereotyping breaking — market-driven approach, giving young women and men a better chance to find decent work. This includes context-relevant career counselling, mentorship and coaching to accompany young women's safe transition into work, and ensuring that girls and women are made aware of their rights in the labour market. Where needed, governments must implement special measures for young women making it easier for them to get the skills, knowledge, and assets needed for meaningful employment.

Urge Member States to recognize domestic labour, including housework and domestic care work, as valuable economic activity. Work done within the home is not counted as contributing to the growth of an economy. This economic assumption has severe consequences for women and girls. Throughout the world, girls and women continue to undertake the majority of care and domestic work, doubling or even tripling the length of their working day — yet this work remains unaccounted for in terms of their country's Gross Domestic Product. According to the International Labour Organisation, 67.1 percent of all child domestic workers are girls. Most of the work girls and young women carry out is unseen and undervalued. Girls and women are not an untapped economic resource; rather their work is the invisible structure that keeps societies and economies together.

Encourage Member State investments in policies and social protection systems to create an enabling environment for women to enter and thrive in the formal labour market, such as maternity leave, affordable and accessible child care, flexible work hours and social security.

Emphasize the essential need to incorporate gender equality and gender-based violence prevention and response strategies into women's economic empowerment initiatives. Freedom from violence is vital for girls' and women's economic empowerment. Intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence directly impact productivity in the workplace, with negative consequences for both individuals and employers, as well as the wider economy. Over 35 percent of women around the world have experienced either intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence.

Investing in girls' and women's economic empowerment is essential to achieving gender equality and helping girls and women to reach their potentials, and fully realize their human rights. Enabling girls to learn, lead, decide, and thrive can transform lives, communities, countries, and the world.