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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 Women’s World Summit 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

Urge Commission on the Status of Women Support for a Fifth World Conference on Women in 2020

We advocate holding the Fifth World Conference on Women in 2020 and urge the Commission on the Status of Women to come out in support. This would be 25 years after the Fourth International Conference held in Beijing in 1995. It would be a first in the 21st century, a first since the widespread reach of information and communication technology that could address the effects on women and girls of a global economy, climate change, and prolonged, unresolved conflict that leads to internal displacement, migration and the current refugee crisis. In addition, there are new emerging ways to exploit women's bodies, such as forced surrogacy, and harvesting of embryos and organs. There has been progress since Beijing, but the ringing words "women's rights are human rights, human rights are women's rights" is far from universal.

The Fourth World Conference on Women was the largest-ever gathering of the world's women with an estimate of over 50,000 participants. Many new non-governmental organizations were formed as a result; many women were empowered by attending and became leaders when they returned home. Women's rights were recognized as human rights in the Beijing Platform for Action.

Until this conference, women were considered passive victims in an unequal world. The Fourth World Conference on Women addressed gender relations rather than women's issues, recognizing that women's roles and status are in relation to men. Governments agreed to promote gender equality in the twelve areas of concern, including the burden of poverty on women, unequal access to education and training, inadequacies of healthcare, violence against women, protection of women in conflict situations, inequalities in economic empowerment, inequalities between men and women in power sharing and decision making, insufficient mechanisms for the advancement of women, lack of respect and inadequate protection of human rights of women, media inequality of access to communication, gender inequalities in the management of natural resources and safeguarding the environment, and the persistent discrimination against and violation of the rights of the girl child.

The generation most represented at the Fourth World Conference on Women was women "boomers", those born after World War II, and the largest cohort until the "millennials." The millennials would come to the Fifth World Conference on Women with their idealism, international perspective and acceptance of diversity and equality to further women's equality, agency, and empowerment in the world. Real change comes when there is a critical mass of individuals who accept what once was resisted or even condemned and leadership at the top who comes to embody the change. The Fifth World Conference on Women under the auspices of the United Nations would bring women together and they in turn will be linked via smart phones and other means of technical communication to their villages, cities, and countries, and to their support circles.

"That women need to become activists on their own behalf" was the conclusion reached by the authors of the largest global study ever conducted on

violence against women, as detailed in the September 2012 issue of *American Political Science Review*. They found that only strong feminist movements are able to voice and organize around the top priorities of women. The study found astonishingly high rates of sexual assault, stalking, trafficking, violence in intimate relationships and other violations of women's bodies and psyches. The study included every region of the world, varying degrees of democracy, rich and poor countries and a variety of the world's religions. It covered 85 per cent of the world's population. Without strong feminist movements, the abuse of women is side-lined, subordinated to men's needs or to the priorities of institutions or political parties.

The abuse of women and girls takes many forms, from domestic violence to street violence, to institutional violence, to collateral damage in war, as well as assumptions that a female is property to be bartered for in child marriage, mutilated as in female genital mutilation, used for sex or labour or as a womb. Considered inferior and unworthy, girls and women are denied education, medical care, and food. For women to have human rights, women must become activists on their own behalf, supported by The Charter of the United Nations, which affirms the equal rights of men and women, the Beijing Platform for Action, which lays down specifics in twelve areas, Security Council Resolution 1325, which recognized that both men and women are essential for peace, and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, which has been described as a bill of rights for women.

Advocacy for a Fifth World Conference on Women is a grassroots, civil society effort that began in 2002 by women participating in parallel events during the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women meetings, who have persevered in this effort in the years since. An online petition "Support a UN 5th World Conference on Women" was signed by 18,544 individuals.

Rationale for having a Fifth World Conference on Women

4.1 A Fifth World Conference on Women is an opportunity for collective accountability and recommitment to women's rights and empowerment. It is important to seek global compliance and ensure that the global, regional and national policies and commitments are translated to practical, lived realities for women. A Fifth World Conference on Women must identify the barriers and bottlenecks to implementation and propose strategic and practical solutions and identify the deep-rooted trends as well as emerging issues that impact negatively on efforts to accelerate the advancement of gender equality. The conference should also identify the positive facilitating factors that can unleash potential and opportunities for women and girls.

4.2 A Fifth World Conference on Women will provide the opportunity to assess progress, celebrate and announce achievements made over the decades such as a) at national level: the adoption of legislation on violence against women, gender responsive budgeting, girls education initiatives, campaigns to reduce maternal mortality, mobilization of women in the AIDS response, etc.; b) the significant progress in various regions such as the European Union Declaration on Violence Against Women; the Africa Protocol on Women's Rights, among others, c) the global progressive steps such as the adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, the systematic monitoring through Convention on the Elimination

of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and the establishment of UN-Women, etc.

4.3 A Fifth World Conference on Women creates a significant opportunity for citizens, women and men to robustly debate and reposition women's rights and gender equality as central to the post Millennium Development Goals agenda. It brings into sharper focus the importance of centering women's rights and empowerment in the new development framework, thus offering options to the current Sustainable Development Goal framework where a gender agenda has been powerfully included.

4.4 A Fifth World Conference on Women will re-engage the women of the world to reclaim and own the agenda for women's rights and gender equality as well as their contribution to a world of peace, justice and development.

4.5 A Fifth World Conference on Women by nature is MORE than a single event in one place and for a few people. It is a global multi-level and multi-year mobilization effort that re-energizes and sustains the women's movement; creating open spaces for stakeholder dialogues. It offers opportunities to many young women to own and experience the women and gender equality agenda in their own way. It is an inter-generational space of learning, sharing, nurturing and positioning the women's rights and empowerment agenda. In a context of many crises such as financial, food, fuel, conflict, values and norms — it is critical that there is a clear space for a recommitment to women's rights and gender equality.

Cosponsor advocates of a Fifth World Conference on Women:

- Pathways To Peace
- Earth Child Institute
- Women's Intercultural Network