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Statement submitted by Women Thrive Worldwide, 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

Women Thrive Alliance, an initiative of Women Thrive Worldwide, is a global network of 250 member organizations located in over 50 countries. These organizations are led by local change-makers who believe that women and girls should live free from violence, enjoy quality education, and achieve economic empowerment. They believe that by challenging the status quo, they can achieve greater equality for all.

For some 18 years, Women Thrive has connected Alliance members with decision makers, securing them a seat at the policymaking table where they can voice their priorities and solutions, and directly engage in local and global development dialogues.

A year has gone by since the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals at the United Nations. While the excitement around the new Agenda to end poverty has brought new opportunities for partnerships and dialogue at global and national levels, our members — grass-roots women's rights groups — continue to feel disconnected from their national governments as the implementation process moves forward. Women and girls, gender equality advocates, and civil society organizations representing marginalized groups still struggle to access information and resources, be seen as legitimate partners by government agencies, and operate in a safe and enabling environment.

For this 61st session of the Commission on the Status of Women, the Women Thrive Alliance sets forth the following recommendations for United Nations agencies, member States, and other actors involved in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

1. The analysis of the intersectionalities of women's struggles, poverty, and violations of rights should be constantly present within the design of policies and programs implementing the Sustainable Development Goals. Efforts to work with grass-roots leaders and advocates to better understand how violence against women affects their capacity to be active economic agents should be central to the solutions brought in to boost women's economic empowerment. Women and girls' access to education, political representation, and sexual and reproductive health services should be addressed within any program aiming at giving women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownerships and control over land and property. Most importantly, governments need to acknowledge that there can be no unilateral progress on independent goals, but that a holistic integrated and inclusive process is needed to ensure sustainable changes and development.

2. In a context of shrinking civil society spaces, governments must ensure that there is an enabling environment for civil society participation, and in particular that of grass-roots women and girls' groups. Governments must ensure that counter-terrorism, public order, and safety measures and policies do not violate citizens' rights to mobilize and advocate for their rights. Governments must also ensure the safety of Women Human Rights Defenders and ensure that no actors within the state — be it the police, army or any other law-enforcement agency — engage in harassment. Women and girls need to be full participants in policymaking: their participation should not be tokenistic or merely consultative. Instead, it must be meaningful. The

voices, perspectives and solutions of women and girls' living in poverty must be included in policy conversations that affect their lives and communities. This is the only way that implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals will be successful.

3. United Nations and government relationships with the private sector (particularly as they relate to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals) must be made transparent so that public goods and services do not risk becoming compromised by private interests. Civil society space is too often being ceded to private sector interests in decision-making and implementation under the guise of "new partnerships" for the Sustainable Development Goals. Governments must create an enabling environment that places civil society as an equal partner in the planning, implementation, and monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals so that policies and programs reflect citizens' needs and priorities, not corporations. Finally, governments must make all public-private partnerships information available to the public and invite civil society watchdogs to ensure citizen's access to services and rights remain the end goal.
