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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 International Women’s Year Liaison Group, 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

International Women's Year Liaison Group brings together 36 national women's organizations, with the common goal to achieve a gender equal society. We believe that the "Economic Independence of Women," a perennial theme in the context of women's empowerment, is the key to achieve gender equal society, and active participation of women at all levels of decision-making process is essential for that purpose.

Factors preventing Women's Economic Independence

It is submitted that the entrenched gender structure has been the culprit, still preventing Japan, a stable democracy with reliable economic structure, from attaining gender equality, as evidenced in the slow Government response to past and present recommendations by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women ([CEDAW/C/JPN/CO/7-8](#)).

It is also submitted that the fact that women have not participated much in most decision-making processes, be it in governments (nationally and locally), or in businesses, by structured gender bias, although we have had the Constitution which guarantees the equality under law and prohibits discrimination in political, economic or social relations because of sex (Article 14) since 1947.

Taking into consideration that the male-dominated structure, with few females participating in any decision-making process, has made it possible (1) to enact family law which forces one spouse to legally give up one's maiden name on marriage, thus, to forfeit continuity in pursuing personhood as an individual, (2) to maintain tax codes inducing married women to choose dependent status while married, coupled with (3) national old-age pension scheme based on one's own earned income, which discourages married women to seek divorce because of their financial uncertainty, needless to say that home-makers, lacking in economic independence, do not have sufficient bargaining power to negotiate during the process, (4) to establish divorce case law, in which there is no alimony nor guarantee of equal division of properties accumulated during the marriage, and (5) to promote care systems for the young, the aged, the infirm and other disadvantaged, which, in fact, depend very much upon family members for their implementation, again inducing non-breadwinners to choose to leave employment to care for those in need. These features are often explained as promoting women's interests, but are in fact, pushing women to choose the dependent status of home-makers. We deem it most urgent to increase female participation in any and all decision-making process in politics and business communities to alter those gender-biased schemes.

Government Policies

We welcome the present Government's commitment to empower women and to promote gender equality, as expressed in the Prime Minister's announcement at the Sixty-Eighth Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations on September 26, 2013 and sincerely hope that these wonderful words had not been said in vain.

We also welcome proposals announced, as recent as October 2016, by various political parties, including parties in power, i.e. Liberal Democratic Party and Komei Party, as well as those in the opposition, i.e. Minshin To (Democratic Party), Communist Party of Japan, Seikatsu no To (People's Life Party), Social Democrat Party, Nihon Ishin no Kai (Reformation Group of Japan), in various formulae, to encourage political parties in equalizing the number of male and female candidates running for national and local level elections.

Our Commitment

We deem it utmost important to mobilize women to actively participate in any and all elections and to urge women to run for public offices and, of course, to vote according to our own good judgment, so that enough women will participate in all decision-making processes, and that all these gender-based statutes repealed, and case laws overruled. We believe it is the fundamental principle of a free and democratic society for women to express their own will, instead of depending upon men purporting to “understand and realize women’s wishes on their behalves”.
