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Statement submitted by International Council of Women/ Conseil International des Femmes, 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

The International Council of Women, a Non-Governmental Organization in consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council, has worked diligently to advance equal rights for women since its establishment in 1888. We hold steadfast in our commitment to fully implement the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. In our view, and in the view of many, it is promotion of women to seats, at all levels, of decision-making bodies which facilitates progress toward sustainable development. We also recognize that bringing an end to all forms of violence and discrimination faced by women and girls is an indispensable requirement, not only for building peaceful, inclusive and just societies, but also for sustainable development.

The International Council of Women congratulates Liberia for their 29 September 2016 milestone constitutional amendment — “The Equal Representation and Participation Act of 2016,” establishing five parliamentary seats for women, one for the disabled and one for youth. This prodigious achievement, fully supported by the UN-Women, various women’s groups and civil society, is an important step towards equal opportunities for women and economic development in Liberia.

According to the World Development Indicators in 2016, women in decision-making positions, such as legislators, senior officials, and managers, range from a low of 5 percent to a high of 52 per cent around the world. Very few countries have surpassed the 50 percent level. In the business world women in senior management positions and on corporate boards remain a stark minority.

We call on the United Nations Member States to adopt legal measures to increase the participation of women in all sectors of society. Such measures include gender quotas, capacity-building programs, higher education and other incentives to speed women’s representation to at least the 50 percent level in all government institutions, economic enterprises and social organizations. Furthermore, we urge political parties to implement quotas for women candidates in elections.

Information and communications technology have changed the workplace in many parts of the world, leading to fissured workplaces, changing labour force, changing availability of jobs, and increase in non-standard employment. The change in circumstance finds many women employees adversely affected in a variety of ways, and therefore necessitates appropriate governmental response. Several groups of workers are particularly vulnerable in new workplaces, including women, single parents, seasonal workers, freelancers, and senior workers. Moreover, workers under the new workplace conditions are not covered by current labour laws and standards and therefore do not benefit from the protections provided. The International Council of Women urges governments to quickly review their new workplace conditions and adopt new standards and regulations to protect women and girls working under such new workplace conditions.

The International Council of Women vigorously supports “Ending Violence against Women”, one of UN-Women’s priorities. Violence not only has negative consequences for female victims, but also adversely impacts families, the community and the country as a whole. Sadly, violent behaviour toward women

readily passes on as a kind of norm to the next generation. Resource commitment to fighting against this kind of violence is necessarily enormous and draws substantially from other essential needs. Hence, sustainable development finds it difficult, if not impossible, to coexist with sexual violence.

Despite efforts by governments and organizations, violence against girls and women persists. It finds many forms: trafficking girls and women, child marriage, genital mutilation, domestic violence and exploitation in the workforce, to name a few. The International Council of Women calls on the United Nations Member States to adopt strong measures to prevent gender-based violence. These measures should include potent penalties for offenders, easing legal access and redress for victims, enforcement of child-protection laws, establishment of support and rehabilitation programs, provision of funding for the collection of data on violence against women, and providing early, broad-based education against violence.

International society should take concrete measures to put an end to sexual trafficking across borders and child pornography over the internet. We encourage governments to pass legislation against early marriage of girls. Our reasoning is that early marriage almost always prevents these girls from receiving the kind of education necessary to realize their potential as individuals and as members of society.

The International Council of Women calls on the Member States of the United Nations to actively implement Security Council Resolution 1325 and engage women's active participation in conflict prevention, peace negotiation and post-conflict peace-building processes so that these issues can be addressed and eradicated.

The International Council of Women is alarmed by the current refugee crisis from the various conflicts in the world. Concerned that many of the asylum seekers are women and children, the International Council of Women urges governments to protect asylum seeking women and children from sexual and gender-based violence, and treat them in accordance with the humanitarian standards and principles set by the United Nations.

The International Council of Women firmly supports the goal of the United Nations in The Agenda for Sustainable Development to ensure that all human beings, including women and girls, will be able to reach their full potential in dignity, equality and healthy environment. Gender equality and women's empowerment are central to progress in virtually all components of sustainable development.
