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Statement submitted by World Young Women’s Christian Association, 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 World Young Women's Christian Association is a global movement impacting over twenty-five million women, young women and girls worldwide. On this 61st session, we stand together as a movement calling for decision makers to ensure that their economic and labour policies and actions substantively contribute to fulfilling the human rights of ALL women, young women and girls. It is a fact that when more women work, economies grow. Therefore, investing in women's economic empowerment is crucial for gender equality, women's rights, poverty eradication and achieving an inclusive economic growth for all.

Economic development often comes at an especially high cost for women, young women and girls. In most labour markets, women and young women continue to participate on an unequal basis with men. Yet, they are using innovation, entrepreneurship and creativity to mitigate these economic inequalities. Across the globe we are starting small businesses in the informal and formal economies, paying school fees for our children, and helping our families move toward sustainable livelihoods. Women's and youth organizations are supporting us to change our lives and communities. Yet, for many of us, the inequalities built into global capitalist structures prevent us from achieving economic security.

We live in a world where those with financial and technical means can immediately purchase products and services previously out of reach. Economic and digital divides marginalize the rest of us, resulting in rising rates of deep poverty, economic insecurity, and economic violence, all of which disproportionately impact women, young women and girls. Globalization also means that those who can, are able to relocate to places with jobs because work constantly moves to where employers make the highest profits. When men migrate for work, we are often left behind in communities that lack access to jobs, health care and higher education. Yet, increasing women and girls' education contributes to higher economic growth. When families migrate together, women, young women and girls are at increased risk of violence, including sexual violence and trafficking.

When we are able to enter the labour market, we find ourselves being paid significantly less than men. We are the last hired and the first fired and often excluded from organized labour. Our professional skills are often unrecognized and undervalued. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) has estimated that in the absence of targeted action, pay equity between women and men will not be achieved before year 2086 ("Women at Work: Trends 2016", Geneva: International Labour Organization, 2016). This is too long for us to wait — we need this inequity to end now so that we can create the lives we deserve and enjoy the human rights that we are guaranteed. Women's economic equality is good for business.

In both the formal or informal labour markets, we remain unsupported before, during and after childbirth. We are the least privileged members of households and remain the primary caregivers of family members. Not only is our critical care work made invisible and excluded from financial compensation, but we are expected to balance unpaid care work and long hours of paid work. We are seen as consumers rather than rights bearers, and economic policies targeting us often focus on encouraging us to buy more rather than on fulfilling our right to economic security. It is evident that economic power structures benefit privileged men at the direct

expense of the billions of women, young women and girls who are considered nothing more than “cheap labour”.

Women, young women and girls seen as second-class citizens in many societies feel discriminated against on a continuous basis in the political, social and economic spheres. Many of us are pushed into the informal economy, where lack of access to labour protections or decent work threatens our safety and health. In countries under military occupation or in conflict, economic inequality is even more drastic as women, young women and girls are doubly impacted by both the patriarchal structures within their societies and the brutality of the occupation or conflict itself. Under these conditions, we face greater likelihood of economic exploitation, and our vulnerability is increased by the lack of authorities capable of protecting our rights.

For the majority of women, young women and girls sex and gender discrimination intersect with discrimination based on race, ethnicity, religion, health, status, age, class, caste, ability, migration status, sexual orientation and gender identity, pushing many of us who are multiply marginalized into poverty in a global economic system that privileges wealth and men. Millions of us work as domestic labourers in unsafe and insecure conditions under which we are particularly vulnerable to rights violations. For those of us who are Indigenous, the economic violence of ongoing settler colonialism results in our territories, waters and resources being stolen and when we fight to protect them we face criminalization, further increasing our economic marginalization. Those of us who are members of LGBT communities face discrimination, excluded from family benefits, and victimized by workplace violence due to discrimination based on our sexual orientations and gender identities.

With globalisation, these challenges have multiplied and have been elevated to new levels. The development of multinational companies operating outside of their home countries and in countries where labour costs are low, has especially posed challenges for women, young women and girls. We see how labour legislation leave women, young women and girls without access to information about their human rights and essential legal remedies. Weakened government institutions and the presence of corruption in countries are escalating these challenges. As a result, women, young women and girls have nowhere to turn to demand justice and human rights protections.

As the World Young Women’s Christian Association, we create, champion and transform inter-generational and shared leadership of women, young women and girls. Through our collective efforts, we gain support and confidence to break away from the entrenched roles that society has assigned us. Our movement is critical to supporting women, young women and girls to claim their rights and receive rights protections. In light of our concerns about the changing world of work, we demand that decision-makers take steps to ensure the following:

- That comprehensive and effective accountability mechanisms are created to protect all women and young women in all work places;
- That human rights and critical labour standards are enforced to protect all women, young women and girls participating in formal and informal labour markets;

- That strict guidelines, regulations, and their monitoring processes for the informal sector and domestic work are strengthened to protect the rights of women, young women and girls;
- That laws and practices of member states promoting and allowing discrimination in the economies and workforces are challenged. These discriminatory laws include but are not limited to:
 - o lack of provisions for paid parental care,
 - o lack of equal pay between and among genders,
 - o impunity for hiring and/or firing an employee based on age, health status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or disability.
- That all girls are able to access and complete secondary school and that gender-specific supports, such as scholarships that include child care and family support costs, ensure that young women have equal opportunities to complete tertiary education;
- That multinational corporations and the States in which they are registered are held accountable for violating the rights of women, young women and girls, including economic, sexual and eco-violence, regardless of where these violations take place;
- That the international community effectively supports the creation and maintenance of stable national governing institutions, including National Human Rights Institutions, in all states where multinationals operate;
- That states are held accountable for violations of economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights under military occupation and settler colonialism, and ensure an end to all forms of occupation and colonialism as a crucial step toward achieving economic justice for all women, young women and girls;
- That the rights of workers are reinforced through special guidelines such as the enforcement of quotas for women and young women as leaders in decision making processes;
- That such quotas acknowledge the diversity and varying marginalisation of women, young women, and girls, and assure our inclusive participation;
- That women's and youth rights defenders, are adequately funded to ensure the sustainability of their work and health;
- That women's and youth rights networks and organizations, are recognised and supported as drivers of social and economic development for all members of society.