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Statement submitted by Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America, 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

My name is the Most Reverend Michael Bruce Curry and I am the Presiding Bishop and Primate of The Episcopal Church, incorporated by the State of New York and known at the United Nations as “The Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America.” We are a Christian denomination of two million members in 17 countries and a member province of the worldwide Anglican Communion. I am honoured to submit this statement as our Church’s spokesperson charged by our canons to “speak God’s words to the Church and to the world, as the representative of this Church and its episcopate in its corporate capacity”.

As Christians, we believe that all humans are created in God’s image and equal before God. Our scriptures, the way of Jesus Christ and our Baptismal Covenant call us to seek and serve Christ in all persons, regardless of gender. These values lead us to affirm the United Nations’ progress in empowering women and girls through dialogue, coordinated action, international norms and legal instruments. Episcopalians have accompanied the United Nations in this work since its inception, supporting international agreements, advocating for their implementation, and adopting programs and policies for women’s and girls’ empowerment in our congregations.

To advance “women’s economic empowerment in the changing world of work”, we must re-vision the way women and their work contributions are valued, measured, supported and compensated. Traditional social roles have kept women primarily in caregiving and domestic activities at home, with only limited, undervalued opportunities in the workplace. Changing social norms, greater independence, expanded rights to vote and own property, and increased work outside the home have expanded women’s and their families’ economic capacity. While celebrating this, we recognize that women still have not reached their full economic potential in their work, and thus neither have our societies.

Therefore, we ask member states to swiftly adopt and implement legislation addressing these urgent priorities:

Promote women’s and girls’ access to education and gender equality education for all

Education must be prioritized for women and girls to gain the knowledge and skills to realize their full economic potential at work. While girls’ access to primary education has improved, still many cannot attend school due to underfunding, expensive school fees, geographical distance or insufficient resources. In many societies, girls must drop out of school to marry or tend to family and unpaid domestic work at home, missing out on higher education leading to better employment. More training and alternative education is needed for girls and women who cannot obtain a formal education.

Education also is needed for all members of society — including men and boys — on the social, economic and political benefits of gender equality. We must recognize that when women participate fully and equally as economic contributors and workers, all of society benefits because women act in the interests of their

families and communities. This education should identify root causes, including traditional religious views, sexism and machismo, of gender inequality and how it leads to gender discrimination. It must urgently address the magnitude and scope of gender-based violence and identify its manifestations at work, including but not limited to physical assault, psychological abuse, harassment, bullying and denigrating language.

We urge member states, United Nations entities and civil society to:

- adopt awareness campaigns and policies promoting education and prioritize funding for women and girls;
- offer financial incentives to families who may pull girls out of school at an early age;
- promote gender equality education for all, including how gender inequality leads to gender discrimination, and its negative effects for all of society;
- prioritize gender equality education for men and boys;
- expand awareness campaigns to identify and prevent gender-based violence at work;
- universally ratify and implement the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and its Optional Protocol.

Expand socio-economic benefits that support women's contributions at work

Women encounter many barriers to their economic empowerment at work. In addition to education, women and girls need lifelong quality health care in order to work, including sexual and reproductive health and family planning.

Work produced by women and girls occurs more frequently in the informal economy and non-regulated environments, including unpaid caregiving and domestic work in the home, unpaid or informal work outside the home and in small businesses. Poverty may force women into unregulated, dangerous or illegal work. Too often work in the informal economy is unrecognized or undervalued, not measured for its economic contribution to families and societies, and lacks safety regulations.

In more formal work environments, women may not earn enough for a living wage and they are compensated less than men for equal amounts of work. Lack of paid parental leave, affordable child care and/or resources for single-family households may keep women at home, caring for family rather than contributing to the workplace.

Women also encounter social, political and financial barriers to promotions, management, leadership, executive and ownership positions and to self-representation at work. Sexism and “glass ceilings” quash their advancement. Women cannot represent themselves and their interests as effectively without high-level representation, role models and unions. Patriarchal legal and economic systems also discourage or exclude women from owning land or businesses, being recognized as parties in contracts, and taking part in financial and commercial transactions.

For women to realize their full potential, these barriers must be replaced by just, equitable socio-economic measures that incentivize their success.

We ask member states, United Nations entities and civil society to:

- ensure quality health care for all women and girls, with access to full sexual and reproductive health provisions, family planning and disease prevention;
- in formal workplaces, include health care provisions in employment contracts;
- conduct gender-specific statistical studies to measure work contributions by women in the informal economy, including at home;
- promote awareness of the socio-economic value of unpaid, undervalued caregiving and domestic work in the home and wider society;
- encourage minimal social protections and safety regulations for work considered illegal or immoral;
- ensure that women receive a living wage for their work;
- institute equal pay for equal work and annually report on gender income parity statistics;
- encourage provision of socio-economic benefits in formal work contracts, including parental leave, affordable child care and support for single-family households;
- encourage quotas, direct appointments and other means to achieve gender balance in promotions, senior-level positions;
- promote women's leadership and support women's organizations and trade unions;
- establish national laws that allow women to rightly purchase and/or inherit land and other properties without discrimination.

Prioritize resources and programs for marginalized groups of women and girls

As followers of Jesus, Episcopalians are called to lift up the least, the left-out, the lost, the marginalized and the forgotten. Thus we embrace the principles in Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals to “Leave No One Behind” and to “reach the furthest behind first”. To achieve this, attention must be paid to women and girls who suffer disproportionately, experience discrimination or are excluded from realizing their potential at work: women without the right to work or without proper documentation — migrants, undocumented workers, refugees; women who are prone to discrimination — women of colour, indigenous women, women from minority groups based on ethnicity, language, religion, sexual orientation or gender identity; women who cannot access work due to disabilities or ill health; women in rural areas; enslaved, trafficked or incarcerated women; women whose work is illegal or considered immoral, who suffer from social stigmas; older and ageing women; women heads of households; women in developing countries.

The needs of these groups often are unmet or treated as secondary to broader social goals and programs. Consequently, they are perpetually disadvantaged,

displaced and neglected, and less likely to find economic empowerment in their work.

We urge member states, United Nations entities and civil society to:

- grant preferential financing and programming resources for these groups;
- promote awareness campaigns and sensitivity training through public education;
- extend accessibility of education and health care to promote inclusion in the world of work.

As Christians, we believe God cares equally for all. We ask member states and the United Nations to overcome barriers to women and girls fully flourishing in the world of work, and uphold the values, principles, legislation and programs for gender equality and gender justice at work, which benefits all.
