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Statement submitted by Women’s Division of the General Board of Global Ministries of the United Methodist Church, 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 Women's Division of the General Board of Global Ministries, United Methodist Church (United Methodist Women) has made women's economic empowerment and the rights of women in the workplace a key priority. This is a critical element in advancing gender, racial, economic and environmental justice for women and their families. In view of Agenda 2030 goals of reducing poverty, advancing gender equality and environmental sustainability, overcoming inequality and leaving no one behind, we urge member states to address systems of inequality that undermine women's human rights and labour rights by guaranteeing the right to decent work and social protection for all.

Changing World of Work

Corporate globalization and the free flow of capital across borders has led to:

- More precarious work, particularly for women;
- Rising economic inequality within and between nations;
- Mass migration for work;
- Forced labour and trafficking;
- Intensified conflict over scarce resources that undermines local livelihoods;
- Weather due to climate change that disrupts jobs and economic stability and causes displacement;
- The privatization of many public sector services leading to fee-for-service for critical needs such as health care, water and sanitation, as well as more precarious work for public sector workers and the out-migration of skilled labour such as nurses and teachers;
- The growing power of corporations to impact democratic decision-making;
- The undermining of trade unions and attacks on the right to obstruct organizing and collective bargaining; and
- More highly exploitative labour conditions, particularly for migrant women workers tied by contract to one employer and vulnerable to their abuse, and the rise of slave labour.

Globalization has led to a race to the bottom for production, particularly in textile and garment manufacture, which employs primarily women workers. This has meant both super-exploitation and then loss of jobs as women organize and factories move to more profitable sites. It has undermined labour and environmental standards. Global trade rules with international dispute mechanisms give corporations the power to sue nations and override national law in the pursuit of profit. The free flow of finance capital and the imposition of austerity through debt and aid policies have meant greater reliance on women's unpaid work, more dangerous and precarious work, and a decline in women's power to influence domestic policy. Women who must do many hours of unpaid work in the home are less able to seek paid work.

We now see a global care chain where women from the global south provide the care work for women in the global north, many of whom are themselves working longer hours for less pay with little support at home. In this new reality, women leave their children to be raised by others, while raising another's children for long hours and little pay.

Women work in the sectors with low pay that offer few benefits such as health care and pensions, with high levels of workplace violence and limited opportunities to legally claim their rights, leaving many of them in poverty. This situation has gender, racial, ethnic and class dimensions in each nation, where social and economic norms pose barriers.

United Methodist Women and Economic Empowerment

Driven by our faith, United Methodist Women approaches the issue of women and work through our four priority themes — addressing Economic Inequality, Maternal and Child Health Climate Justice and ending the Criminalization of Communities of Color.

Our work on women's economic human rights in the United States supports low-wage women workers' organizing for just wages and benefits; the rights of tipped workers to earn the minimum wage; the rights of domestic workers to have full labour rights by law; slave-free production; women's right to freedom from violence in the workplace; and the right to equal pay, family and medical leave and childcare support. In addition, we are addressing the economic insecurity of young women who are faced with massive student debt — supporting campaigns for free public higher education and reduction of debt. This debt affects women's education and career choices and has a substantial impact on their economic future.

We recognize women's access to health care, including reproductive health, is essential. The need to care for their families can come at an economic cost for working mothers, particularly low-income or single mothers who lose pay or receive bad performance reviews when they cannot go to work because they must stay home to care for their family.

In the U.S., women of colour are systematically marginalized from access to quality education and jobs. Many are subject to racial profiling and unequal sentencing as well as the growing reality of debtor's prison for poor women — all of which have precipitated a dramatic increase in the number of women in prison. Corporations rely on prison labour for profit. Living expenses are deducted from minimum inmate wages, resulting in women being paid a pittance for their work — an alternate form of slave labour.

Globally, United Methodist Women supports women's efforts to build livelihoods through cooperatives and income-generating efforts; provides scholarships for higher education for young women and offers leadership development opportunities. We address systemic issues including debt, trade and environmental policies that often undermine women's livelihoods and economic options. We support efforts that reduce violence against women and facilitate their pursuit of work and education. We also support migrant domestic workers' organizing in Asia and Africa, programs that enable poor women to access credit and grow small businesses, farming skills training that enhances income and child

nutrition, fair trade projects, and job programs for survivors of human trafficking. We support the human and labour rights of migrant women workers around the world.

United Methodist Women Calls on United Nations Member States to:

- Enact legislative and executive policies to bring national laws into conformity with Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the Migrant Rights Convention, Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and all core International Labour Organization (ILO) labour standards. We particularly lift up ILO convention 189 on the rights of domestic workers.
- End gender-based violence in the workplace. We note the campaign of the International Trade Union Confederation as a tangible example of how we can take action.
- Affirm sustainable development and sustainable consumption and production commitments through Agenda 2030 national plans by challenging corporate practices that intensify conflict or lead to women's dislocation.
- Guarantee the right to form and join unions in practice.
- Affirm the human rights of all migrant women workers, regardless of status, including their labour rights. Replace temporary worker programs that rely on women's labour without extending rights, family reunification or permanent immigration status with full rights including access to citizenship.
- Adopt labour market policies that address structural and systemic barriers relating to gender, race and nationality.
- Address gender stereotypes in the labour market through national programs and monitoring. Increase wages and benefits in sectors traditionally dominated by women as well as equal pay in all sectors.
- Meet or exceed commitments made in the Paris Agreement to reduce carbon emissions, making substantial transitions to fossil-free energy and recognizing the need to aid and retrain dislocated workers.
- Outlaw the use of prison labour and end all forms of slave labour.
- Defend women human rights defenders including those who challenge corporate displacement and who defend women's labour rights.
- End the impunity of state violence, which disproportionately targets people of colour, costs lives and undermines families' economic security.
- Halt backing internal conflicts and war in other nations maintained to further economic and political interests. These conflicts lead to death, displacement and the loss of livelihoods for millions.
- Address both disproportionate underemployment and employment discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity and women with disabilities.
- Guarantee women's right to health care, including reproductive health and maternal health. End work restrictions on women of childbearing age.

- Affirm the rights of women in the informal sector, women farmers and small entrepreneurs to decent work and social protections.
- Implement progressive taxation policies and curbs on corporate tax evasion. Eliminate the right of corporations to sue sovereign nations for the loss of potential profits.
- Create laws that guarantee equal pay and provide opportunities for paid family and medical leave, sick days and childcare.
- Build strong democratic institutions responsive to the needs of all in the society.

As a faith-based women's organization of 800,000 United Methodist Women will continue to enable women to lead and to ensure their voices are heard defending their human rights and holding governments accountable.
