



## Economic and Social Council

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### Commission on the Status of Women

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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 League of Women Voters of the United States, 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.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

### **The value of women's perspectives and political leadership in engaging reforms for rural women**

We acknowledge the strides of many women around the world who have awakened to their collective strength, value and voice as decision-makers and political leaders. Women's unique perspectives complement and inform discussions about sustainable social, economic and political policy at all levels of government and in all stages of nation building, both in periods of peace and in periods of hostility. But at the present time, most women's voices are not heard in the halls of power. According to the January 2017 Inter-Parliamentary Union report, women hold the position of Head of State in only 7.2% of nations and women are only 19.1% of Speakers of Parliaments. Gender parity in elected political office will energize and drive the achievement of all SDGs. We ask the United Nations to lead by example to appoint qualified women leaders and lead the paradigm shift toward gender balanced decision-making. We ask further that the United Nations and its Member States prioritize efforts to increase the percentage of women in leadership roles, as stated in SDG 5 Target 5.5.

We concur with the conclusion of the High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development that there is a critical link between women's political empowerment and enhanced economic growth of a society. We agree with the findings of the July 2017 report of the United Nations' Secretary General, A/72/207, that Member States should "promote the full and equal participation of rural women and girls in rural development, governance and decision-making at all levels, by coordinating national gender equality mechanisms and other governmental and non-governmental institutions and civil society organizations at all levels. (paragraph 53c) We believe that increased participation by women in politics will accelerate the establishment of a more comprehensive solution to the problem of women's poverty, gender discrimination, gender violence and severe economic disadvantage.

All Member States in the United Nations, especially those countries challenged by large population segments of women and children living in extreme poverty, must speed up the process of actively engaging women in the political process. Governments and civil society at the local and national level must encourage women to associate and assemble freely and peacefully. Programs must sensitize young women and girls to the opportunities to raise their hands and question the discriminatory and cultural foundations to which they are relegated. Factual information delivered through modern communication technology must be shared with marginalized women and their opinions must be sought. Voting must be encouraged and women must be advised that their community's survival and prosperity depend on their engagement in the political process.

When we listen to women and girls, we hear them say that they want to contribute more to their family's economic well-being. Women are more likely than men to re-invest their earnings back into their families, thus helping lift their children, and our collective well-being, out of poverty. When women are employed in the formal work force and given access to markets they contribute substantially to the overall economic health of their communities and nations. The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization estimated that 54% of the farmers in the developing world are women. Those women, when healthy, educated and employed, will feed more people and dedicate much of their income to improving their children's education and health thus lifting up their impoverished and hungry friends, family and world neighbours to sustainable living conditions. Women

demonstrate sustainable farming practices that increase the yield in their farms by 20%–30%. Promoting and enforcing secondary education for girls will result in increased earnings that in turn raise women out of poverty and result in accelerated national economic growth. When women become political leaders they accelerate progress toward gender parity in parliaments and achievement of the sustainable development goals. So we ask ourselves: Do our current leaders support initiatives to amplify women's voices? Are our current leaders listening to women's perspectives? When the answer is no, as is oftentimes the case, we ask women, men and boys to mobilize on behalf of all women seeking elected office.

Fulfilment of the potential of gender equality in political leadership roles relies on women and men actively listening to one another. The sooner women's perspectives enter the political discourse, the sooner sustainable living conditions will be achieved and gender discrimination will be sublimated. Women are likely to dynamically change the tone and content of political discourse. Women can bring special and valuable perspectives to discussions, not the least of which is that women can re-introduce civil discourse to the discussions. Women leaders welcome civil discourse on political ideology and cultural norms that continue to impede women's entry into leadership positions. Women steer discussions toward democratic principles such as freedom to associate and assemble, and encourage other women to speak their truth and vote their conscience. All the while women work toward gender parity, governments and civil society must raise women's awareness of the obligation to cast an informed vote and support fair unbiased electoral processes and sustainable government institutions.

Women political leaders are empirically more likely to value gender equality policies. Women political leaders introduce and support laws and public service programs that demonstrate the promise of primary and secondary education for girls, the elimination of child marriage, improved basic health needs through water sanitation programs, and fair economic opportunities for women. Enactment of gender equality policies translates into improved personal security and decreased discrimination against women in the society. The more the elected leaders represent the gender balance of their people, the more women are treated equally before the law.

Nations and civil society must continue to amplify the voices of women who pursue their rightful place as equal participants in a fair and peaceful society. Women cannot, and should not, wait until 30% of their elected leaders are female to pursue and attain needed reforms. Indeed, women must pursue change at the grassroots level now. Women must look to each other for support and encouragement to make decisions that will promote access to markets, access to health care services, access to child care and access to protective services. Women must promote education and civic leadership for girls.

Encouragement and support for women to participate in the political arena is critical to the achievement of gender parity in government. Civil society can lead the way to demonstrating the best practices of civil discourse and transparency in government. Civil society can demonstrate the value of informed choice and power of the ballot. We ask that in addition to leading the way by appointing qualified women to at least 50% of all senior positions, that the United Nations prioritize, finance and amplify its initiatives to increase women's participation in parliaments and expedite the attainment of the sustainable development goals. We cannot afford to leave rural women or any women behind.