



## Economic and Social Council

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### Commission on the Status of Women

Sixty-second session

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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 Union for International Cancer Control, 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 Union for International Cancer Control (UICC) is a global membership organization, uniting over 1000 cancer organizations across 155 countries, and a committed member of the NCD Alliance, an international civil society organization that works collectively to elevate the profile of non-communicable diseases on the global development agenda. UICC wishes to commend the 62nd Session of the Commission on the Status of Women for recognizing the importance of addressing women's empowerment, particularly as it pertains to rural women and girls, and participation in and access of women to the media and to communications technologies.

Non-communicable diseases (NCD), including cancers, cardiovascular disease, chronic respiratory diseases, diabetes, and mental health and neurological disorders are the leading cause of death worldwide, accounting for over two thirds of all global mortality. Of the total global non-communicable disease deaths, approximately 18 million occur in women, many of who are in the most productive years of their life. The inclusion of a target to reduce premature mortality due to non-communicable diseases in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is an unequivocal recognition by the United Nations and governments' that the growing burden of non-communicable diseases is one of the major health and development challenges of the 21st century. Moreover, achieving Target 3.4 on non-communicable diseases is necessary to make progress towards Goal 3 on health, Goal 4 on education, Goal 5 on gender equality, and Goal 10 on inequality, among others.

Many women and children in low-and middle-income countries bear a triple burden of poor health related to reproductive and maternal health, communicable diseases, and non-communicable diseases. Increased exposure to risk factors such as tobacco use or second-hand tobacco smoke, unhealthy diet, physical inactivity, harmful use of alcohol, or air pollution affects not only women's health, but also increases the vulnerability of future generations to ill-health.

Women and girls bear a disproportionate burden of non-communicable diseases — they are often the caregivers in families, and can forsake their own health and pursuits in favour of male relatives and elders in their families. Girls leaving school to care for family members living with non-communicable diseases often forgo their education and economic potential. In households with members living with a non-communicable disease, income is often spent on medicines and treatment instead of food and education, particularly for girls and women.

With this in mind, the need for gender-sensitive and responsive health systems is particularly important in developing countries. Many women are unable to seek care owing to the lack of female caregivers, stigma, or social and cultural norms, and the poor availability of and access to quality, affordable essential medicines, vaccines, and technologies further exacerbates the problem. Particularly for women and girls in rural settings, long journey times to health care centres prohibits them from accessing care as for many, the need to secure a male relative to accompany them results in lost wages from two members of a household due to travel time. Access to communication technologies can help deliver gender-sensitive and responsive health systems. Innovative solutions such as m-health (mobile health) programs reach women in their homes and address some of the barriers to care.

Strong commitments and immediate action to prevent and control non-communicable diseases requires the integration of non-communicable disease

prevention and care into existing women and children's health programs, which will accelerate women's empowerment through a holistic, life course approach to health prevention and promotion.

In light of this, we strongly urge the Commission to:

- Ensure that addressing non-communicable diseases through a life course approach to health is a critical component of promoting women's empowerment. The Commission should seek to build on the commitments for action contained in the 2011 United Nations Political Declaration on Non-Communicable Diseases and the Outcome Document of the 2014 United Nations Non-Communicable Disease Review; the Sustainable Development Goals and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; and the Global Strategy for Women's, Children's and Adolescents' Health by integrating non-communicable disease prevention and access to essential medicines and services for non-communicable disease treatment into its outcome document. Ensuring access to affordable quality preventive and treatment services is an essential component of women's empowerment.
- Strengthen the focus on equity to ensure no one is left behind. Disaggregated data by gender, age, disability, and income will be necessary to ensure that the SDG era improves the lives of all women and girls throughout the life course.
- Invest in health systems strengthening and health workforce training to empower community health workers to reach women and girls in rural communities in order to improve accessibility to health care services.

Please be assured UICC stands ready to support Member States as we work to promote women's empowerment and integration of Non-Communicable Diseases and Reproductive, Maternal, New-born, Child and Adolescent Health programmes to help create a healthy, equitable future for all.

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