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**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women
and to the special session of the General Assembly
entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development
and peace for the twenty-first century”: implementation
of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of
concern and further actions and initiatives**

Statement submitted by Femmes solidaires, 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.



Statement

In France and around the world, women's rights remain unequal. In the view of the non-governmental organization Femmes solidaires, there are two ways of looking at the future of our planet as far as women are concerned. One is to think that each woman has what she deserves based on where she was born, the culture and history of her country and her origins. The other sets life lived together as its ideal, with the rights of women aligned to the highest standard. Such a collective momentum is embodied in a single concept: the universality of women's rights.

Fundamental rights, such as equality, the right to live free of violence and domination, and the right to make her own decisions about her body and to live in dignity, must be a reality throughout the world.

Our organization believes that statements that rely on the concept of cultural relativism in order to undermine our rights are dangerous, as they interfere in the process whereby feminist groups strive to strengthen the rights of women.

All women should have equal rights throughout the world, regardless of their culture, their origin, the country where they live or their religion, to build a more egalitarian world without violence.

The rights of women to control their own bodies

A form of violence against women on our planet is to question the right of women to control their bodies. From deprivation of the ability to control births to rape as a weapon of war and from genital mutilation to the criminalization of homosexuality, women are constantly being forced to struggle to gain access to, obtain or maintain that right. Respect for that right is never seen as natural; it cannot be taken for granted.

With regard to the four fundamental rights, which are: the right of access to the voluntary interruption of pregnancy and to contraception; the right to fully live their sexuality, including homosexuality; the rejection of efforts to treat women's bodies as objects; and the right to participate in sport and exercise, the Femmes solidaires organization demands that States develop a comprehensive strategy able to deal with the attacks instigated by male domination through political, economic, social and/or religious power.

Poverty: violence against women

The Femmes solidaires organization considers poverty to be violence against women.

In the world, as in France, 80 per cent of the poor are women. There are structural reasons for such numbers. Women are forced to accept part-time work, wage differentials and contracts with no guarantees. The economic crisis we are experiencing is unfortunately synonymous with social, cultural and economic regression, increased insecurity and poverty, and rollbacks of social gains and sometimes rights. Women are the first to be affected.

Discrimination and violence

The list of discrimination and violence against women is long: domestic violence, economic, social, occupational, physical, moral violence, etc. Such violence is present at all levels of society, including sport, media and culture.

The campaign to combat violence against women is a movement that must be global. It is rooted in the rejection of discrimination and sexism, as defined in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which was adopted on 18 December 1979 by the United Nations and entered into force on 3 September 1981, a little more than 30 years after the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Convention reaffirms the principle of equality by asking States parties in its third article to take “all appropriate measures, including legislation, to ensure the full development and advancement of women, for the purpose of guaranteeing them the exercise and enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms on a basis of equality with men”. Violence against women feeds on gender inequalities. To say no to discrimination is to say no to violence.

Our organization requests States that have ratified the international conventions to respect them and apply them without reservation.

Prevention: non-sexist and non-violent education

Our organization demands that States act to prevent gender-based violence starting at an early age, thereby breaking the continuum of violence by working to challenge gender stereotypes. Such stereotypes exist and persist in all cultures and communities.

They affect children from the earliest months of life, young people, as well as all the actors — male and female — in the education process: parents, educators in all fields, national education, media, etc. Non-sexist and non-violent education must be supported by political will, with financial and educational resources dedicated to promote respect for secularism and diversity.
