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entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and
peace for the twenty-first century”**

Statement submitted by FEMM Foundation, 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 FEMM Foundation is a knowledge-based health program for women inspired by women's right to be informed participants in their own healthcare and to make voluntary decisions based on options, information, and understanding. The Foundation is dedicated to health education, medical research, and improving reproductive health care to advance women's health.

Health can foster or hinder women's economic empowerment. Poor health interferes with education, family life, and the ability to work. International law recognizes a right to the "highest attainable standard of health." This is important not only as a right, but as an enabler of participation in the social and economic life of one's community. Ensuring that all have the healthcare that they need will help empower women so that they have the ability to work and adapt to different working situations as labour markets and needs shift. This ensures that women are able to develop their gifts and contribute to their families, jobs, and societies.

FEMM's researchers have rethought women's health. They have found that a woman's hormonal health is intrinsically linked with her overall health. They have developed better diagnostic criteria to identify conditions that are currently treated mainly at the symptomatic level and treat them at the roots. They are even discovering links with conditions not typically considered related to reproductive health. FEMM is rethinking the health of contemporary women in ways that will help them to take charge of their health and thrive in their communities.

FEMM is low-cost and meets the underlying needs of women in ways that empower them to participate in the economy. Comprehensive health care for women can now be provided through basic health delivery systems, making this approach to women's health more effective, cheaper to deliver, and providing stronger health outcomes for women. Even women who have not completed schooling can learn to monitor their signs of health. Understanding women's bodies will also combat stigma and myths associated with normal biological processes such as menstruation that can interfere with education and economic opportunities.

FEMM teaches women to understand the importance of hormonal health to their overall health. Teaching women to understand and monitor the signs of their hormonal activity empowers them to make better and more informed health decisions in all areas of their lives. It allows them to identify abnormalities at an early stage to seek appropriate health care and treatment. It allows them to make informed choices about their health, relationships, and family planning. And it helps them to put those health and family planning goals into action to achieve the results they want.

A woman who understands how her body works can monitor her health and seek help when needed. FEMM knows that hormones are essential to reproductive and overall women's health. Ovulation is the sign of health in women because it is the proof of sufficient hormone levels in the 9 essential hormones that influence women's health. FEMM teaches women to understand this information and the signs that this presents in their body. In this way, FEMM women are able to identify abnormalities as they arise, seek health treatment when necessary, and ensure that their symptoms or complaints are not dismissed.

Signs of hormonal imbalance are common to many women. They range from acne, to weight gain, depression, migraines, pain, irregular bleeding, and conditions such as polycystic ovarian syndrome. Many women are told that these symptoms are not important or just in their head. They are told that irregular cycles are “normal” for them, and that these associated pains are simply the difficulty of being a woman. Yet these symptoms can have a profound effect on women’s ability to participate in the workforce, and a lack of understanding can foster negative attitudes about women as employees and entrepreneurs.

We now have the science to understand that these symptoms are not normal or healthy, and the ability to diagnose and treat the underlying cause of these symptoms and conditions. This is exciting and empowering for women. By taking control of their health, they will have greater freedom in their decisions about working life.

One tool FEMM has developed to help women take control of their health is the FEMM App. This app is available free of charge. Women who use the FEMM App can track their observations and symptoms to better understand their bodies and health. Just as each woman is different, so are her observations and experiences, which is why the App is completely customizable. Women can track as much or as little as they like, and add symptoms and observations. The latest version includes cycle insights to help women understand what they are observing. It also can flag potential health concerns and connect women with medical professionals for treatment.

FEMM also provides women with economic opportunities through becoming FEMM teachers. Women who complete the FEMM training, either in person or in an online course, can educate others in their communities and supplement their incomes. Not only does it promote peer mentorship in health, which will improve community health outcomes, but it also provides a flexible source of additional income for women who are students, employees, or not currently working. FEMM is working to increase its teacher recruitment and make training available more broadly so that women all over the world can benefit from both the knowledge and the economic opportunity that being a FEMM-trained teacher provides.

FEMM is also training healthcare providers. The FEMM Medical Management program trains doctors to diagnose and treat reproductive health problems, with a holistic view of a woman’s body that incorporates recent research on the complex hormonal interactions between different body systems. This interaction, and the delicacy of the hormonal activity in a woman’s body, is essential to the experience of health in the entire female body. FEMM has developed innovative protocols that allow doctors to identify underlying problems with precision and treat them effectively. This ensures not only that women are healthy, but that they have the benefits of health: education, employment, and fulfilling personal lives.

As childbearing disproportionately affects women’s ability to participate in the workforce, it is important that women be able to make informed choices about having children. The World Health Organization estimates that 225 million women desire to delay pregnancy but do not use the most commonly promoted forms of contraception. Since FEMM focuses on informed choice and the education of women, it is uniquely situated to provide new solutions in this area. FEMM Health takes into consideration women’s health needs, family preferences, and values to

provide solutions. It offers reproductive and hormonal education and help women to understand the way various family planning methods work and their potential side effects. This will lead to improved health outcomes and the ability to make informed choices about family size, helping women to make plans about their family and professional lives.

Women's economic empowerment requires the investment in women's health and health education, especially in our changing world. We know that informed decisions lead to healthier decisions, that poor health hinders the ability to work, and that women play a key role in family and community health outcomes. The knowledge gained through FEMM can allow women to identify underlying health concerns and to achieve or avoid pregnancy. When people attain the highest level of health they can, they are able to thrive and partake in their communities, adapt to changes in the marketplace, and contribute both inside and outside the home. The FEMM Foundation urges this Commission and Member States to promote healthcare that meets the needs of women. FEMM is prepared to address the needs of women through educational programs and cutting edge medical support.
