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Statement submitted by Mediators Beyond Borders, 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

On the occasion of the 62nd session of the Commission on the Status of Women, Mediators Beyond Borders International (MBBI) highlights the need for the international community to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges to women's empowerment. MBBI underscores the importance of nations taking action to promote greater women's participation through inclusivity, self-determination and peacebuilding — to achieve gender parity. Particularly, MBBI recognizes the unique challenges of rural women and girls, and how creating educational and professional opportunities can propel these women to empowerment. In consideration of the review's theme of media, information and communications technology, MBBI believes that modern tools can effect positive change for women's empowerment, and advance principles of peace, security and collaboration.

Seventy-one years following the Commission's establishment, the status of women continues to present lingering challenges for the achievement of gender parity. MBBI is optimistic that accelerated gender equity can be spurred by nations willing to make targeted investments in identifying challenges; investing in leadership, mentorship and equal representation; and utilizing technology and information as powerful pathways for sustainable change.

MBBI believes that gender parity and global peace and security go hand-in-hand. Where both genders are equally represented in decision-making, leadership and governance, the probability of positive change and lasting peace is greatly enhanced. MBBI advocates for conflict resolution and provides services to the development field, multilateral agencies, and corporations interested in enhancing their work with conflict-sensitive and trauma-informed practices. Our multidisciplinary teams design and implement projects with local partners and increase abilities to help heal from severe conflict, reconcile communities, and sustainably transform a community from conflict to a stable, economically viable community. These projects embody the SDG 2030 goals on partnership, gender equity, education, environmental protection and peacebuilding.

Just as the principle of inclusion is increasingly mainstreamed in the language of international peace and security, it also appears at the forefront of the Sustainable Development Goals as they aim to foster peaceful and inclusive societies. Explicit links have been drawn between peace and prosperity through the emphasis placed throughout the Goals on the need to secure a sustainable peace. Inclusion provides the context in which marginalised groups such as rural women can place issues of specific concern to them on the agenda.

Through our work, we have found that women mentors play a significant role in conflict resolution and prevention at the local community level. MBBI, through its International Training Institute (ITI), provides skill-building training that empowers women in leadership roles to become more engaged in peacebuilding, conflict resolution and prevention, education and partnerships. Our May 2017 ITI meeting in Bogota, Colombia saw multidisciplinary volunteer teams jointly design and begin implementing multi-year, trauma-informed projects. By strengthening civil society, mediation practices can be introduced into communities through culturally relevant methods. ITI also trains women in a range of skills — and supports civil society efforts for sustainable peace and development.

True to principles of inclusion and self-determination, decisions about women must involve women at the negotiating table; otherwise, self-determination cannot be achieved. The statistics of women's representation at high-level negotiations are stubbornly low. As outlined in the joint report *Shaping the International Agenda* by UN Women and International Gender Champions Geneva (March 2017) "In January 2017, there were only 19 women Heads of State or Government and, in 2015, women ministers represented only 17 percent of ministerial posts. Only three women have served as President of the United Nations General Assembly in the past 71 sessions." Self-determination cannot be achieved unless there is equal representation of gender at high-level negotiations and consultations on national public economic and legislative change, especially relating to issues affecting women such as sexual and domestic violence, health care, reproductive rights, child care, income equality, indigenous affairs, and educational opportunities for girls.

MBBI recognizes that increased inclusion of women as mediators and peacebuilders is both a challenge and an opportunity. In 2009, the United Nations Secretary General issued a report ([S/2009/189](#)) on enhancing mediation and its support activities, while describing the need for experienced and knowledgeable mediators and support teams, with women adequately represented. In the report, the Secretary General recommended the fostering of gender balance and expertise in senior mediation posts. A UN Women Report entitled "Women's Participation in Peace Negotiations: Connections between Presence and Influence" (2012, at 26) concluded that "women's absence in peace processes cannot be explained by their alleged lack of experience in conflict resolution or negotiations. Instead there has been a lack of effort to integrate them in formal peace processes."

The United Nations Secretary-General's Seven Point Action Plan on Women and Peacebuilding ([A/65/354-S/2010/466](#)) calls on the United Nations to ensure that technical assistance in conflict resolution processes furthers women's participation as appointed decision-makers. In the publication "Preventing Conflict, Transforming Justice, Securing Peace, in response to the Global Study on the Implementation of Security Council Resolution 1325," the authors highlighted that peace processes that include women as mediators/negotiators result in a 20 percent increase in the probability of a peace agreement lasting at least two years. Whilst there is a desire by the United Nations and other stakeholders to include women in mediated forums, there may be a gap between the perceived talent pool and the actual pool of international, national, and local talent available that are highly trained and highly qualified mediators. MBBI feels stakeholders must take initiative to identify, recruit and promote women mediators in all forms of negotiation. In addition, mediators must also take great care to include women's voices in the mediation process. In this same report, the authors indicate "the design of the rules and structures of a political dialogue, and the influence of the mediator's role, can determine the extent to which women's voices are heard".

It must also be recognized that rural women and girls face unique challenges, and their plight requires special consideration for inclusion, self-determination and peacebuilding. Rural women often hold domestic or agriculture roles, and may have limited access to legal rights (including land rights), education, opportunity and technology. Cultural and religious constraints may restrict participation and acceptance as equal partners, especially pertaining to land and asset rights. In war zones and high-conflicted areas, the rights of rural women are often overlooked, however the inclusion and empowerment of rural women in times of conflict is vital to ensure a lasting peace.

Finally, the 21st century has seen rapid advancement in connectivity of humanity through media, and information technology; however, this connectivity has not always been free and has been controlled by political regimes or inaccessible due to rural infrastructure challenges. Such connectivity may prove to be an opportunity in the fight for women's empowerment across the globe. Women are equipped with the capability to access information, advertise opportunity, train and receive training on skills development, and stay connected. Media can also play a pivotal role in women's empowerment. Human rights principles of freedom of expression and speech, and hence empowerment, often begin with grassroot forces supported by a free and accessible media.

MBBI provides the following recommendations to the 62nd session of the Commission of the Status of Women for consideration:

- Train local women mediators to support women in leadership, negotiation and decision-making roles to effect peace and security post-war or conflict eras to enhance peace and security.
- Provide community-based conflict resolution and prevention training for rural women to support an understanding of legal rights (including land and financial rights). This must be conducted in a manner that is sensitive to the personal, cultural, religious, and/or racial differences of the training recipients.
- Identify, recruit and promote women mediators to achieve gender parity during the mediation process — and require an analysis of gender inclusion during the formulation of process, consultation, and implementation.
- Create strategic alliances between the public and private sector to provide greater universal access to inexpensive and far-reaching technology, with a focused effort to disseminate information, educate, and connect all women, especially rural women.
- Support the freedom of media, information technology and communication to advance gender rights by removing barriers and creating bridges for women to communicate by using social media, information technology and traditional media sources.
- Ensure equal representation of gender at high-level negotiations and consultations on national public economic and legislative change — especially relating to issues affecting women, such as: sexual and domestic violence, health care, reproductive rights, child care, income equality, indigenous affairs, and educational opportunities for girls.