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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 Regards de femmes, 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

[Original: French]

For twenty years, the non-governmental organization Regards de femmes has been working in France and around the world to ensure that every woman and every girl can enjoy safety, equality, recognition and respect for her dignity, in public and private spaces and in urban and rural areas alike. These areas of autonomy and freedom must enable women to study, to obtain health care and access to justice, and to work, and thrive, with men and with other women.

Regards de femmes seeks to ensure that every woman and every girl has a legal identity — the most basic human right — and that every woman, regardless of her marital status, is able to register her children's birth.

In order for women and girls to fully exercise all their rights, it is essential for their names to be recorded in the civil registry at all stages of their life, and in particular at birth and marriage.

For real equality of rights, duties and dignity to be achieved between men and women, including women with disabilities, Regards de femmes and its partners rely on the international conventions that States have signed and under which they are accountable to their peoples:

- Article 3 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights stipulates that the States Parties undertake to ensure the equal right of men and women to the enjoyment of all economic, social and cultural rights set forth in the Covenant.
- The articles of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women on economic and social rights, in particular article 10 on education, article 11 on the elimination of discrimination in the field of employment, article 13 on the elimination of discrimination in other areas of economic and social life, and article 14 to ensure women's participation in rural development and its benefits.

Regards de femmes advocates with

- State and local authorities for the provision of public services
- Companies, to show the economic and social advantages of drawing up a comparative report on women's situations
- “Auxiliary family workers”, in particular farmers' wives and daughters, to share best practices so that their work is recognized and they receive compensation.

Advocacy with State and local authorities

Social protection has provided support and leverage for the economic empowerment of women even where their rights stemmed from their status as wives or mothers. We are now asking for those rights to be individualized, including in the area of tax.

Today's recessionary policies are resulting in cuts to public services and social benefits.

Women disproportionately suffer the effects of this, which jeopardizes social gains:

- The threat of setbacks to acquired rights and/or a stoppage of the work still to be done before existing formal rights can actually be exercised

- Social spending helps to offset the economic and social inequalities between women and men. Any decrease in such spending strongly affects women, who make up the overwhelming majority of low-wage earners.

Compared to women and girls living in urban areas, those living in rural areas have neither the same access to, nor the same supply of, public services. Their children too suffer from a dearth of services. In a given rural area, women and girls are worse off than men and boys.

Sources of employment, health services, public transport, schools, from kindergarten to university, cultural and sports centres are distinctly fewer; where facilities do exist, they are very hard to access.

Rural girls have less access to sexual and reproductive health services. Even in areas where the Pass contraception voucher programme has been implemented, they are less likely to obtain or make use of the vouchers.

The assistance provided by community organizations is very sparse in rural areas.

For some ten years, Regards de femmes has been committed to the extension of the Act on Parity in the Political Sphere to rural communes. The association organizes meetings to encourage rural women to be candidates in local elections and, if elected, to train them to fulfil their mandate and exchange best practices.

Women's involvement in local political life helps to ensure the implementation of public programmes for the empowerment of women and girls through access to sustainable infrastructure at the level of the commune or a group of communes: extended school hours to allow students to stay before and after the official schoolday, childcare facilities for children outside school periods, intercommunal nurseries, provision of collective transport to take students to schools, and subsidies for salaried workers' to cover transport between home and the workplace.

Public authorities must establish, for their individual offices, a comparative report giving a rundown of their activities and an assessment of their policy on occupational parity between women and men. This report should also indicate the nature of the community's or group's policies to promote equality between women and men.

In the specifications they draw up, local authorities must include the gender equality rule and present a comparative activity report on the award and execution of public contracts.

Advocacy with companies

There is a clear social responsibility incumbent on businesses, whether family or multinational, public or private. To reduce gender inequality, businesses should comply with the following standards:

Adopt greater transparency on compensation policy;

Eliminate any wage gap between men and women engaged in the same activities and equally qualified;

Ensure that both women and men can enrol in training programmes;

Give public recognition to women employees:

- Put a stop to communications that discriminate against women.

- Have a Board of Directors whose membership is at least 30 per cent female and encourage men to participate in committees, councils and observatories working on equality policies (HeForShe).
- Respect occupational parity requirements; implement an action plan to eliminate pay gaps and differences in career development for women and men. In many European countries, access to public procurement requires evidence of job desegregation.
- To allow men and women to share housework equally, family constraints need to be eased, for women and men alike: through flexible hours, parental leave, and intercompany nurseries and day-care centres.

Regards de femmes organizes workshops to sensitize companies to the importance of adapting working conditions as set out above, to inculcate best practices and to encourage companies to find new ones. And indeed, entrepreneurs, both women and men, are undertaking to change companies' ways vis-à-vis their partners (employees, shareholders, suppliers, customers) and society as a whole (environment, land, consumers, public health).

The non-governmental organization organizes international meetings to share information on local actions in various countries, in order to enhance women's visibility, collective voice and representation in small and medium-sized enterprises as well as on family farms.

Women make up nearly half of the world's farm workers. However, not only are they unpaid family workers, for the most part, but persistent patriarchal traditions in many countries have meant they cannot own or inherit land, so that they do not have access to loans or the necessary training to be able to increase their production. These difficulties can be compounded by the lack of a legal identity.

Our Côte d'Ivoire partner, Organisation Nationale pour l'Enfant, la Femme et la Famille, is the model for the provision of support for rural women and their empowerment. Its actions have contributed to the promotion, defence, respect and protection of women's rights, capacity-building for women in the technical, material and financial spheres, and an increase in their income.

The notable progress achieved — and available for dissemination to our other partners in developing countries — has included access to land and the means of production, inheritance, and participation in decision-making bodies in the villages.
