



## Economic and Social Council

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### Commission on the Status of Women

Sixty-third 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 Global Fund for Widows, Guild of Service, National Alliance of Women’s Organizations, National Board of Catholic Women of England and Wales, Northern Ireland Women’s European Platform, Soroptimist International Great Britain and Ireland (SIGBI) Limited, and Widows Rights International, non-governmental organizations 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

### National Alliance of Women's Organisations' Statement

The priority theme of The Commission on the Status of Women provides a superb opportunity for those interested in equality to ask serious questions. In light of the recent and current economic crisis we should ask: What are the elements of our economic system that make it dysfunctional? How can we amend the system to ensure the most vulnerable are protected whilst yet encouraging effort and hard work? When we are considering social protection and access to services, should we not also be asking: Why are women so excluded from meaningful decision-making when evidently their participation benefits all? In what ways can we stop the growing inequality that threatens stability in every country? How can we ensure the rights of one group without denying those of another?

Women and men are equal. In principle they always have been. Yet throughout history this truth has not been the lived experience of peoples the world over. Traditional systems have favoured the participation of men over that of women. From politicians and leaders of thought to young people at school and in the street, the equality of women and men is acknowledged. Yet the progress and participation of women and girls is still obstructed in all walks of life.

Injustice continues to suppress the potential of women and girls. Whilst this exists humanity will remain enmeshed in confusion, conflict and imbalance moving from one crisis to another.

Qualities that govern the relationships between individuals, institutions, and other societal constituents shape how society functions. Thus our understanding of these relationships will dictate the practical measures we put in place in our attempt to better order our society,

Constant examples of positive qualities such as kindness, acts of service and courage, cooperation and empathy, are evidence that the idea that human beings can only act in selfish, violent and competitive ways is erroneous. At this Commission on the Status of Women 63rd Session therefore, is it not timely to ask how much these noble tendencies would develop if governments allocated substantial resources to cultivating the higher nature of their citizens, and focusing vigorous learning processes around how the latent ethical and moral powers of their inhabitants can be developed and released?

For a flourishing, peaceful and prosperous world, we need the participation of all people, whose skills and talents can be harnessed and harmonised for the needs of humanity. If millions of people are unable to realize their potential due to poverty, lack of education, lack of security and so on, humanity is missing out on their perspective, talents and skills. Social systems therefore have to be enhanced to enable the full participation and progress of all.

The diverse and undervalued qualities that women can bring to the workforce, and to every sphere of life, have left humanity suffering from their lack of influence. We can hardly imagine what could be achieved if women and men, girls and boys, were able to unleash the amazing potential latent in all of us and work collaboratively and creatively in creating the society envisaged by so many including organisations such as National Alliance of Women's Organisations.

National Alliance of Women's Organisations has worked to ensure the voice of young women (and men) is heard. The time of youth represents a period with especial possibilities. Young people can develop a sense of social responsibility and the possibility of being agents of positive change. This requires a concerted effort to

provide opportunities for them from early youth and to build individual capacity and vision. It is vital that young women (and men) are enabled to participate in United Nations processes so that they envision the world as one world and the possibility of effective global governance a reality. The Commission on the Status of Women 63rd Session provides an opportunity to question how young people can be enabled through social protection measures and through full implementation of Agenda 2030. Whilst it is vital to ensure the Agreed Conclusions contain language regarding young women and men, it is also important to ensure that the United Nations as an entity welcomes their participation in reality as well as in spirit.

If we are seeking a world where “strategies for the eradication of poverty to achieve sustainable development for all,” are a reality, surely all of us must ask ourselves why so many people still lack basic material necessities. If we are asking what can be done in terms of public services, social protection and equality infrastructure to ensure the eradication of poverty, perhaps we need to suggest that the severe challenges are a symptom of a severely dysfunctional economic order. We can all provide examples of the ills of extremes of wealth and poverty, increasing inequality, and corruption. Are these not destabilising society and tearing apart communities? How then can we shape laws that do not perpetuate all types of inequality? If we are trying to create an empowering society for all do we not need to ask what is the nature of work? What is the purpose of wealth? Will not this lead us to consider then what types of safety net are required by those unable to access or undertake remunerated decent work?

The emerging issue of The Commission on the Status of Women 61st Session provided an opportunity to hear from indigenous women creating space for voices seldom heard to show innovative approaches from those who traditionally had not been seen as sources of answers. This points us to suggest that the United Nations system develop its ability to see capacity and strength in populations that have hitherto been seen as victims or marginalised.

Throughout the process of the Commission on the Status of Women 63rd Session is it possible for all stakeholders to affirm that populations with limited financial resources are not silent until rescued by some outside force? Can we not seek to change the discourse so that mention of all groups is not framed in terms such as needs and challenges? Low-income groups are often only considered and engaged as recipients of services and assistance. They may be asked about their views to some extent. Should they not, rather, be embraced as equal and capable collaborators in a collective endeavour?

If the purpose of social services is to ensure that all members of society are able to access all portals for self-development and security equitably, we need to consider addressing poverty and lack of opportunities in a lasting way. Do we not therefore have to consider building a new pattern of society? The solution cannot be merely an act of accounting and moving around financial resources. Do we not need to create a society where the adult qualities of justice, compassion, cooperation, empathy are reflected fully in process, programmes and structures?

Within countries each group needs to be seen as one with capacity and possibility rather than the notion that the urbanised are somehow more able than the rural. Likewise, globally, we cannot continue with the outmoded idea that high-income areas have more knowledge and expertise than the village on the plain or in the mountain or forest. The knowledge and expertise may be different but who is to make the judgement as to which kind is better? Do we not need to acknowledge that no one has yet achieved what is needed to create the world so many of us dream of? Neither the financially wealthy nor the rural poor. When devising solutions and strategies around social protection and public services do we not need to reject the

notion of dependence but rather seek how to develop relationships of mutual support and assistance and that these are evidence of a strong society not a sign of weakness.

With the world in such a time of crisis on every front, we ask that the Commission on the Status of Women 63rd Session be a space where States Parties, United Nations Agencies and civil society ask serious questions and discuss frankly and without rancour, how to restructure society to ensure justice and opportunity for all, based on the sure knowledge that we are all equal and have great capacities to contribute to the common weal and betterment of the world.

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