



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
12 December 2019

English only

Commission on the Status of Women

Sixty-fourth session

9–20 March 2020

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 C-Fam, Inc., 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

Twenty-five years after the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the global community is examining the progress we have made in improving the lives of women throughout the world. As we take stock of a quarter-century of work, it is important to remember that the goal of women's advancement must be for all women, across regional, national, cultural, religious, and political differences. We must also remember that women and girls exist not in isolation, but in the context of family and broader society, and that when women truly flourish, it is not at the expense of men and boys, but alongside them.

While we commemorate the pivotal international conferences of decades past and recommit to carrying out their objectives, we must remember that what they contain – and do not contain – is the result of painstaking negotiation and carefully crafted compromise.

The unfinished business of Beijing, as of Cairo, is not to force a global agreement on issues that were controversial then, as now, but to complete the ongoing work of delivering what was promised. These things, like universal access to good education, nutrition, access to justice and financial systems, and maternal and child health, are not always easy to achieve, and cannot be achieved quickly or without a cost. Nevertheless, they are the global project agreed to by consensus, and to fail to deliver them would be to squander the credibility of the negotiated outcomes that elevated them as priorities. Much progress has been made, and much more remains to be done. Above all, we must not allow ourselves to be distracted by issues that do not enjoy consensus among United Nations Member States, much less among the women of the world.

Year after year, this Commission's ability to generate a substantive outcome is threatened by the ongoing attempt to create a human right to abortion or force global recognition of "sexual rights".

Where the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action asserted that gender should be seen in the context of its "ordinary, generally accepted usage" – as referring to men and women in the context of society – there are ongoing efforts within the United Nations system and elsewhere to use gender terminology not to empower women, but to erase them entirely in favor of a non-binary concept. While this is characterized as a more inclusive approach, it inevitably comes at the expense of women and girls. This can take many forms, from creating confusion around women's achievements in athletic events to risking their health and wellbeing. When the definition of "women" is redefined to include biological men, safe spaces for women become threatened, including shelters for those fleeing domestic abuse to women's prison facilities.

In our efforts to advance the status of women in society, it is critical to avoid mistaking equality for sameness. Even in countries and regions that score highest on indices of gender equality, men and women are not equally represented in all areas of work, suggesting that this may be a matter of choice for many, rather than a symptom of exclusion. The work of care within the home, and for children and elders, continues to be performed predominantly by women. It is unfortunate that many of our methods of valuing work fails to account for the truly invaluable work of caring that binds together families and communities and forms the bedrock of human society. In pursuing equality between men and women, it is tempting to argue that equal participation in thmal economy should be the goal, such that across societies, both sexes earn equal wages. While women should be granted equal access to employment and financial services, it is not the role of international organizations such as the United Nations, nor even of national or municipal governments, to delegate the

distribution of work within homes. This is rightly the domain of the family. Furthermore, to suggest that unpaid care work will never be fully appreciated until half of it is performed by men does not elevate women, but contributes to their marginalization.

Also outside the mandate of international institutions such as the United Nations and its agencies is the matter of national laws regarding abortion. There exists no human right to abortion in international human rights law, nor in international humanitarian law. Abortion is neither a right nor a necessary precondition for women's rights. As a great woman leader, Saint Teresa of Kolkata, told the world at the Fourth World Conference on Women at Beijing, "abortion is the greatest destroyer of peace in the world today, and those who want to make women and men the same are all in favor of abortion". Twenty-five years later, those words are more relevant than ever.

It is alarming that United Nations agencies and human rights bodies continue to pressure countries to change their laws regarding abortion. Not only is this beyond their mandates, but it threatens the consensus understanding of human rights that is one of the central pillars of the United Nations and enables accountability when violations occur. In a world facing conflicts, mass migrations, both natural and manmade crises, and uprisings of extremism, it is essential that our common understanding of human rights not be distorted or eroded by activist interpretations.

As the Universal Declaration of Human Rights clearly states, the family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society. It is in this family context that most girls and women live and should be supported by laws and policies that promote family stability, as agreed in Beijing and in Copenhagen. Such policies promote a holistic view of women's advancement and do not frame the wellbeing of men and women as zero-sum. They are also shaped by the understanding that children have a right to know and be raised by their own parents, and that those parents are the primary educators of their children.

The promotion of the family within international institutions must remain free of efforts to subvert the concept of "family" to "diverse forms" that rely on assisted reproductive practices that exploit women's bodies, reduce both men and women to purely utilitarian roles, and commoditize children.

In conclusion, let us never forget what the true diversity of women entails: one sex, with many viewpoints.
