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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 International Network of Liberal Women, and Liberal 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.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Gender Equality, Water and Sanitation for a Sustainable World

Liberal International and the International Network of Liberal Women recognizes the vital role of women as agents of development, and shares the opinion that gender equality and the empowerment of women must be achieved to accelerate sustainable development beyond 2030.

The importance of gender equality and women's empowerment, particularly women's economic empowerment is at the core of the mandates of Liberal International and the International Network of Liberal Women. This means enhancing the role of women as drivers of poverty reduction, promoting female investors and entrepreneurs, and recognizing the link between gender equality and safeguarding the environmental promotion of inclusive and sustainable environment, water and sanitation, and directly contributing to Sustainable Development Goal 6 on clean water, clean environment, innovation and infrastructure, and to Sustainable Development Goal 5 on gender equality.

It is very important to invest in education for women and girls because they have a multiplier effect on productivity, efficiency and economic growth. It is also a matter of advancing women's human rights. Liberal International and the International Network of Liberal Women strongly supports gender equality and the empowerment of women as a stand-alone goal, which should be integrated through targets and indicators into all goals of the new development framework.

To reach the ambitious goal of full and equal participation of women, we have to tackle critical remaining challenges and address the structural causes of gender inequality, such as violence against women and girls, early and forced marriage, sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, persistent gender disparity in secondary and tertiary education, unequal employment opportunities, the persevering gender wage gap, unpaid care work, limited control over assets and property, and unequal participation in private and public decision-making.

Targeting gender equality and women's economic empowerment is not only important from the perspective of realizing women's rights but is also smart economics. Women are key agents of change and when women and men are equal, economies grow faster; fewer people remain in poverty, and the overall well-being of people increases. Harnessing women's potential as economic actors, leaders and consumers results in higher levels and more sustained growth rates. In our opinion, to achieve gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment, it is of utmost importance to transform discriminatory social norms and gender stereotypes including those that limit women's roles to being mothers and caregivers. It is equally important to eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in public and private spaces, including all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriages and female genital mutilation.

This can be achieved through reviewing, adopting, enacting and enforcing laws and regulations that prohibit such practices, creating awareness around their harmful health consequences, and generating social support for the enforcement of these laws.

Focusing on the issue of water and sanitation, we consider the right to safe drinking water and sanitation as a human right essential for the full enjoyment of life and all human rights. We believe that safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene, management of water resources, wastewater management and water quality are all indispensable elements for poverty eradication, sustainability and security of the

world. Especially this must help to address the challenge of nearly half of global population who are forecast to face the water scarcity and water stress by 2030.

On the issue of sanitation and hygiene we propose that by 2030 to have eliminated open defecation; to have achieved universal access to basic drinking water, sanitation and hygiene for households, schools and health facilities; to have halved the proportion of the women without access at home to safely managed drinking water and sanitation services; and to have progressively eliminated inequalities in access.

The consolidation and implementation of integrated water management is necessary to achieve improvements in crucial priorities such as water efficiency, which is a growing concern in the context of adaptation to climate change, water scarcity and water quality. This includes water security, especially in a context of additional pressure on resources, climate change and extreme events, such as floods and drought. Of major importance to achieve this is the establishment of water cooperation, including trans-boundary water bodies.

Liberal International and the International Network of Liberal Women would like to highlight the importance of equitable, participatory and accountable water governance and especially would like to add participatory management of increased water resources.

On the issue of sanitation and hygiene we propose to target by 2030 on:

- to eliminate open defecation;
- to achieve universal access to basic drinking water, sanitation and hygiene for households, schools and health facilities;
- to halve the proportion of the population without access at home to safely managed drinking water and sanitation services;
- and to progressively eliminate inequalities in access since it has important interlinkages with other focus areas including health, food security and governance.

To sum up, Liberal International and the International Network of Liberal Women believe that water is a most important medium through which the major global crises of food, energy, health and climate change, as well as economic crises can be jointly addressed. Together with sanitation, we see water as an important stand-alone goal in the future set of Sustainable Development Goals for the water-secure world.
