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Statement submitted by ActionAid, Associated Country Women of the World, Care International, Christian Aid, Equality Now, HelpAge International, International Council of Jewish Women, International Federation of Business and Professional Women, Islamic Relief, Mother’s Union, National Alliance of Women’s Organizations, National Board of Catholic Women of England and Wales, National Council of Women in Great Britain, Northern Ireland Women’s European Platform, Plan International (UK), Soroptimist International Great Britain and Ireland (SIGBI) Limited, Tearfund, The Law Society, United Kingdom Association for the United Nations Development Fund for Women, Wales Assembly of Women, Widows for Peace through Democracy, Widows Rights International, Womankind Worldwide, World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts, 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

The organizations which work together to form the UK CSO Women UN Alliance welcome the opportunity to take part in the celebrations and reviews taking place during 2020 across the work of the United Nations especially in the field of gender equality. We congratulate UN Women on their 10 years of development of the agenda for women and girls.

The world has changed and continues to change rapidly since the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in 1995. Whilst the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action has become a benchmark for women's rights and there have been many resolutions and agreements supporting, explaining and addressing specifics over the intervening years, in practice for many women and girls it still feels as though little has progressed.

A major development for women and girls was the adoption in 2015 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals when a stand-alone Sustainable Development Goal 5 focusing on gender equality was supported. In addition, a gender lens must be applied to all Sustainable Development Goals, emphasizing the intersectionality and diversity of the female population.

In spite of these major visionary approaches to achieving gender parity, inequality and violations of women's and girl's rights continue. Across the globe governments give lesser or greater priority to gender equality so progress is very uneven. Gathering informative and accurate data is still very patchy so progress is not always possible to determine. When voices of grassroots women and girls are at the table, the lack of data is mitigated. Indeed, any policy or programme focused on a particular group must always consult with that group as a matter of principle.

Alongside progress, we have seen emerging issues that have had a negative impact on the implementation of world-wide goals and targets:

- Increasing levels of natural disasters often resulting from climate change impacting disproportionately on women and girls
- Conflict and tensions rising around the globe generating the need for improved and increased protection and support for women and girls and the increase in widows
- Migration increasingly generated as a result of the above factors; this leads to higher levels of vulnerability among women and girls, especially to increased risks of trafficking
- An increasingly ageing population with women in many countries living longer than men
- Development of technology, with social media creating an environment for cyber bullying and harassment not only of young women and girls, but also female political leaders
- Statistics demonstrate the concentration of wealth in a smaller percentage of the global population resulting in poverty affecting especially women and children
- A deterioration of relationships with men and boys especially with cultural and religious claims to power
- Changes of political leadership and governance which push back existing women's rights particularly in relation to sexual and reproductive health
- Major global financial crises leading to austerity measures in some countries impacting disproportionately on women and girls

- Attacks on human rights defenders, especially women, have increased, often resulting in fatalities

Many of the above issues have emerged so recently that they were not covered specifically by any of the 12 critical areas of concern in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

Progress has been and continues to be made although in some countries it is in small steps.

On some issues there have been major developments such as:

- A greater recognition and inclusion of women and girls in sports and entertainment, both at grassroots and highest levels of performance
- Global statistics show an increase in the number of girls completing primary education
- Recognition of the need to economically empower all women and close the gender pay gap
- Recent recognition of the need to account for currently unpaid care work mainly undertaken by women within a national economic framework
- Improvements in some areas of health care, especially maternal and early child care leading to lower mortality rates
- Heightened awareness of many forms of violence against women and girls, supported by high profile UN Women campaigns, and a willingness by law enforcers to take action against perpetrators
- Strong campaigns to encourage young women to study science, technology, engineering and mathematics subjects and enter careers which are science, technology, engineering and mathematics related
- More women aware of their human rights as well as supportive and protective laws

Whilst much has been achieved, this progress needs to continue and expand especially into countries which have not yet seen the benefit of supporting women and girls in these ways. There is still a long way to go to achieve gender parity as each annual report of UN Women demonstrates.

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the Sustainable Development Goals and the Convention on All Forms of Discrimination Against Women must be seen as intersectional. By using gender equality as a means of implementation as well as an outcome, concrete actions can be taken to improve the lives of women and girls.

It is imperative that the complementarity of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the Sustainable Development Goals and the Convention on All Forms of Discrimination Against Women are recognized. The best actions of implementing all three could have a dramatic, knock-on impact, expediting the achievement of women's empowerment and gender equality. Getting it right now means we should not have to wait another 25 years to achieve the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which in turn substantially contributes to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The gap towards achieving the outcomes envisaged from Beijing, through the Sustainable Development Goals and the Convention on All Forms of Discrimination Against Women has been well recorded, with many reports providing evidence that we are all falling short; that the rhetoric outweighs the action.

We call upon Member States to step up their efforts to enable and empower women and girls specifically to:

- Address human rights for women
 - o It is vital that all Member States ratify the Convention on All forms of Discrimination Against Women and its Optional Protocols in order to promote and protect the full enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by women and girls throughout their lives
 - o Where necessary, Member States should enact new laws to ensure that legal systems address gender based discrimination and violence
 - o Where laws exist, Member States should require their implementation and enforcement of breaches
 - o Member States should ratify and implement the Istanbul Convention where appropriate
 - o Member States should ensure the safety and protection of female human rights defenders
 - o Discontinue the invisibility of widows
- Develop effective accountability processes
 - o Any accountability mechanism should ensure that those making decisions and implementing changes are answerable to the women and girls who these endeavor to serve
 - o Recognize and welcome the role of civil society organizations in holding governments to account
- Ensure the use of gender mainstreaming and gender budgeting
 - o Gender mainstreaming can support the efficacy of gender related policies and programs
 - o Gender budgeting should ensure that resources are available for all implementation of gender related policies
 - o Regional and national action plans should take into account the interconnectivity of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and Sustainable Development Goals.
- Maintain informative and effective data collection systems
 - o Quantitative and qualitative data disaggregated by sex, age and marital status collection, monitoring, evaluation and capacity building must be developed
 - o Support should be given to countries with limitations in capacity for data collection
 - o A wider range of data sources should be valued and used; state authorities and services at all levels should respond to information and citizen generated data collected by civil society.
- Provide support and encouragement for women in leadership roles
 - o Enable and encourage more women to become active in political leadership
 - o Recognize and resource national mechanisms for women's representation

- o Ensure that the voices of women's civil society organizations are listened to and their views acted on

We look forward to the sixty fourth session on the Commission on the Status of Women in the hope that all stakeholders will take firm action to ensure that all elements of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action are achieved within the same time frame as 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Without the full equality of women and girls, de facto and de jure, peace and prosperity for humanity is impossible. Twenty-five years after the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, is this not the time for actions rather than mere words?
