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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 National Council of German Women’s Organizations, 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

The National Council of German Women's Organizations welcomes the report of the Federal Republic of Germany on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Many measures and legislative changes have been initiated in the last five years. However, according to the World Economic Forum, Germany's Gender Equality Index has not changed since 2015, remaining stagnant at 77 per cent. Structural changes are required, as well as a comprehensive equality strategy, the creation of an independent federal institute for equality, the introduction of gender budgeting and gender assessment, gender parity in the country's parliaments, and the ending of policies that function as disincentives.

Inclusive development, shared prosperity, and decent work

We urge the federal government to develop an effective Transparency in Wage Structures Act (page 18). The current evaluation report confirms that existing law does not do enough to tackle the persistent gender-specific pay gap. Among other measures, all companies must be obliged to regularly conduct transparent pay-equity audits and all employees should have the right to information. Effective sanctions must be applied if a company fails to fulfil its obligations.

We welcome the introduction of the law for bridge part time (page 1). However, this right only exists in companies with more than 45 employees, although a particularly high number of women work in small- and medium-sized companies. In companies with up to 200 employees, only one in fifteen employees has the right to make use of this part-time option. We call for an increase in the number of people who can benefit from this law.

We approve of the flexible working hours model that the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women, and Youth offers its employees (page 4). Equivalent plans on the federal level are mentioned in the 2017 coalition agreement, but to date no commitment has been made regarding implementation. We call on the legislative powers to oblige companies and other employers to engage with the topic of "working hours that are suited to different phases of life". Employees should have the right to change the duration and structure of their working hours.

We welcome the introduction of the Act on Equal Participation of Women and Men in Leadership Positions in the Private and Public Sectors (page 2). To achieve genuine progress, the applicability of the existing gender quota act must be significantly expanded. Binding quotas for management and board positions need to be introduced in all German companies, alongside effective sanctions for non-compliance.

Poverty eradication, social protection, and social services

We call for a basic pension that guarantees women and men who have worked for 35 years in employment with mandatory social insurance contributions, raised children, and cared for dependent relatives a retirement income that provides a reasonable standard of living. The basic pension should be granted independently of the partner's income and assets.

Germany is far from an equal and fair distribution of care work (page 3). We call for the creation of wage compensation for care of dependants modelled on parental allowance, which has also been recommended by the independent advisory board for the reconciliation of work and long-term care. We welcome the fact that the Federal Minister for Women's Affairs supports such a measure. In addition, we call

for paid leave for fathers and co-mothers after birth and public subsidies for household-related services, as announced in the 2017 coalition agreement.

We urge the federal government to remove obstacles regarding access to health care. It is necessary to create state-funded options that are independent of social benefit claims for people who have no right to benefits via health insurance. We want the federal government to ensure that health insurance covers prescription-only contraception for all women. Tax subsidies should fund the costs.

Freedom of violence, stigma, and stereotypes

We approve the reform of the law governing sexual offences, No Means No (page 35), as the result of productive dialogue between civil society and the federal government. It is important that with its federal support programme, working together to combat violence against women (page 15), Germany recognizes how much still needs to be done. We call for comprehensive access to protection for all women affected by violence and their children. We demand a greater protection for victims as well as training for persons in the judiciary and other authorities.

The entry into force of the Istanbul Convention (page 36) is another important step. In order to ensure its complete implementation, we demand a national coordination centre to be established that oversees the implementation of and compliance with the Istanbul Convention, and a monitoring centre for data collection and research on the topic of violence against women. Both centres need to actively cooperate with civil society and involve all cooperation partners.

We strongly criticize Germany's continuing disincentive policies, for example married couples being taxed on the basis of their combined income, regulations regarding mini jobs, which continue to reproduce and reinforce inequality and stereotypes. There is also inadequate protection in Germany against sexist and racist advertising. We want the federal government to introduce measures outside the advertising standards authority as an effective instrument against sexist advertising.

Participation, accountability, and gender-responsive institutions

We welcome three milestones set out in the report of the federal government and the coalition agreement: the development of a cross-sectoral gender equality strategy (page 14) was approved, with an associated action plan. In addition, an independent federal institute for gender equality, which would, based on scientific findings, dedicate itself to questions concerning particularly the fair participation of women in society, politics, economics, and science, was also addressed. None of the three initiatives have yet been realized. We have also seen no indication of funding for these projects in the draft of the 2020 Federal Budget Act.

We demand that immediate initial steps be taken towards gender budgeting. To this end, sections in the federal budget that have already been proven to have gender-specific discriminatory effects need to be identified and adjusted to promote equality. Gender equality requirements relating to budget memos under specific sections need to be both discussed in the parliamentary budget negotiations and safeguarded under the guidance of the Federal Ministry of Finance.

We call for more women in parliament. Following the 2017 parliamentary elections, the proportion of women in parliament (30.7 per cent) fell back to the level of 1998. We call on the German Bundestag to ensure parity in the upcoming electoral system reform and to consider rules for concrete proposals for equal participation in parliaments during this parliamentary term.

Peaceful and inclusive societies

We are committed to an inclusive, social, and gender-equal society. We want the federal government to consider and specifically address intersectional discrimination concerning factors such as biological and social gender, sexual identity, age, cultural background, ethnicity, disability, and socio-economic status in the fight for equality.

We call on all democratic powers and institutions to recognize, identify, and tackle sexism and prejudice against homosexuals as elements of right-wing populist and extremist attitudes and ideologies, and to place them on the same level as anti-democratic tendencies, anti-Semitism, and nationalist ideologies. This view must be reflected in the planning of studies, the concepts behind campaigns, and in practical policies to fight right-wing extremism.

Environmental conservation, protection, and rehabilitation

We place particular emphasis on an ambitious climate policy. We call for strategies including the prompt introduction of a carbon dioxide tax and the removal of subsidies that harm the environment, the promotion of zero-emission mobility, the promotion of biodiversity, and the abandonment of coal power as soon as possible. In order to advance gender equality, these measures need to undergo a gender impact assessment.

Conclusion and outlook

We expect the federal government to combine good equality policy approaches into a stringent, sustainable strategy and to lead Germany as the fourth largest economy in the world to the top in terms of equality as well. After all, gender equality strengthens democracy and promotes prosperity and social peace. It protects our society from patriarchal relapses and extremism.

Furthermore, we demand that digital transformation be tackled with gender equality in mind. This transformation is already having major effects on the economic, political, social and cultural aspects of our society. It is vital that structural gender-specific discrimination will not reproduce or heighten during the transformation process that affects the entire society.
