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entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and
peace for the twenty-first century”**

Statement submitted by World Alliance of Young Men’s Christian Associations, 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 World Alliance of Young Men's Christian Associations is one of the oldest and largest youth-focused movements in the world. Founded in 1844, it now operates in 120 countries and reaches 64 million people. The World Alliance of Young Men's Christian Associations are strongly rooted in 12,000 communities around the world, offering a variety of programmes and services based on local priorities and issues affecting young people. This presence gives us unprecedented knowledge of the challenges they face, as well as their potential solutions.

In 2019, we celebrated our landmark anniversary event, YMCA175, in London. This global celebration of youth empowerment welcomed more than 3,000 young leaders from 100 countries who were joined by the President of the United Nations General Assembly and the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth. One clear outcome of the event was that young people need a society that treats them equally, no matter their gender or identity, where diversity is embraced and not seen as a threat.

At the World Alliance of Young Men's Christian Associations, we strongly believe that we should all work toward achieving authentic gender equality and inclusion, taking proactive steps to include girls and women. In 2018, we marked a historical moment with the election of our first female president, a message that reflected and celebrated the profound changes in the communities that we serve.

Despite tremendous progress in the past decades, women and girls continue to be paid less than men in many societies and to disproportionately perform more social and family duties. All the while, they are more vulnerable and exposed to abuse. On the other hand, young boys and men suffer increased anxiety over understanding their role in society, with many being exposed to a culture of toxic masculinity. This is aggravated in the case of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender/transsexual, queer or questioning, intersex young people.

Through numerous grassroots programmes from our national and local movements, the World Alliance of Young Men's Christian Associations is collectively contributing towards gender equality and the Sustainable Development Goal 5: gender equality. Some national movements have gone a step further and included in their by-laws a requirement for their members to commit to non-discrimination and inclusion practices. In some regions, such as Europe, we are seeing a rapid increase in the number of women taking top leadership positions, while in Africa the first woman Secretary General has started her term.

The World Alliance of Young Men's Christian Associations has many key initiatives on gender equality that are proving successful, and there are areas where the associations can share best practices with interested stakeholders. One example is the Y-Strong Girls Program in the United States of America, which provides tools to empower young girls aged 13–18 to develop meaningful lives through healthy choices, self-awareness, mindfulness, movement, camaraderie, and community involvement. The programme has proven to have changed thousands of lives, with over 90 per cent of the girls reporting that the programme has helped them to better use their voice as a young woman.

Another key successful programme is the Transformative Masculinity Approach of the African Alliance of the World Alliance of Young Men's Christian Associations, which has impacted thousands of girls and boys in Kenya, Zimbabwe, and Zambia. Transformative Masculinity explores the different sides of what it means to be masculine and how men and boys can play an active, facilitative, and supportive role in ensuring gender justice and that girls and women can access sexual and reproductive health rights. This approach has supported local communities to reduce

gender-based violence, increase access to healthcare, reduce unwanted pregnancies, and support thriving families.

In Guatemala, the World Alliance of Young Men's Christian Associations is empowering indigenous girls through sports and educational spaces, where they learn about their rights, self-esteem, self-care, civic engagement, and how to develop their entrepreneurship skills. Meanwhile in Kosovo, there is a strong focus on encouraging young girls to become financially independent. All over the world, World Alliance of Young Men's Christian Associations movements are implementing an increasing number of women empowerment programmes.

Traditional gender roles are obsolete and no longer respond to the needs of today's communities. It is the stance of the World Alliance of Young Men's Christian Associations that situations where men are considered superior to women, where girls enter forced marriages (some at very early ages) or are pressured to have children against their wishes, where women are considered unable to perform certain roles, or where women are forced to make changes in their lives by men must come to an end.

Women's rights are fundamental human rights. Men's rights are fundamental human rights. We should strive to reach a point where human rights are viewed holistically, without the gender lens. We should strive for a society that no longer needs gender-based quotas because we would have reached a point where equality is ingrained in our cultures and communities. Sadly, we are very far from that place. Rural and less developed communities are even further behind in the work towards gender equality.

The world is celebrating 25 years since 189 Member States adopted the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in 1995, one of the strongest political declarations for promoting gender equality to date. Globally, we should be bold enough to build on the success of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and make sure that we don't backtrack on its achievements. As we were bold enough in 1995 as a global community, we can be even more so in 2020.

The work towards gender equality can only be effective when it happens at global, regional, national, and local levels. If just one is not doing enough, the entire effort is put at risk. Additionally, this requires coordinated efforts and collaboration between governments, civil society, community organizations, religious organizations, and grassroots movements.

The World Alliance of Young Men's Christian Associations pledges to continue its work towards ensuring gender equality, for a world where every young person feels equal, empowered and included no matter their gender, identity or background.