



## Economic and Social Council

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### Commission for Social Development

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**Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly: priority theme: promoting empowerment of people in achieving poverty eradication, social integration and full employment and decent work for all**

### **Statement submitted by Women's Board Educational Cooperation Society, 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.



## Statement

### **Promoting decent work: enhancing human dignity**

In 1999, humanity welcomed the initiative of the Director General of the International Labour Organization in his report to the International Labour Conference at its eighty-seventh session, where he shaped the concept of “decent work”, which is considered to be opportunities for men and women to obtain productive work in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity. One would think that the simple word “work” should already entail those factors, but the reality made it necessary to emphasize them by adding the modifier “decent”.

Later, in his report to the International Labour Conference at its eighty-ninth session, in 2001, the Director General developed the concept and called for its implementation, saying:

It is about your job and future prospects; about your working conditions; about balancing work and family life, putting your kids through school or getting them out of child labour. It is about gender equality, equal recognition, and enabling women to make choices and take control of their lives. It is about your personal abilities to compete in the market place, keep up with new technological skills and remain healthy. It is about developing your entrepreneurial skills, about receiving a fair share of the wealth that you have helped to create and not being discriminated against; it is about having a voice in your workplace and your community. In the most extreme situations it is about moving from subsistence to existence. For many, it is the primary route out of poverty. For many more, it is about realizing personal aspirations in their daily existence and about solidarity with others. And everywhere, and for everybody, decent work is about securing human dignity.

For many people, women especially, this is a dream yet to be realized. Too often, for example, employers record as a negative point the legitimate desire of a woman to have children and raise a family. They are reluctant to allow maternity leave. In Nigeria, where our non-governmental organization operates, some companies even ask their female staff to sign an undertaking that they will not fall pregnant in the first 18 months of their employment. Often, applications by women for managerial posts are turned down in the belief that women will need more time off work to attend to family responsibilities, such as taking a sick child to hospital or attending school meetings, and that women would not be as committed as men if appointed to a position of authority.

Most women, especially married women, while wishing to give their best in their work at home and outside, have to deal with a non-understanding employer who sees them as not pulling their weight in the organization.

It is important to realize that women contribute immensely to creating a responsible future labour force by raising children, ensuring the stability of the family and managing the household. The family is the basic unit of society, meaning that, when it is sick and not properly cared for, society itself suffers. Given that women have the ability to multitask, they can work in an organization and at the same time take care of the home. If neither of these two parts of life is to suffer, women must have an understanding employer and family and they must be

committed to both parts of life. Unfortunately, homemaking is not yet included in world economic statistics and no monetary value is placed on such work.

Often, women find it difficult to gain employment befitting their qualifications; they are underemployed and unable to develop their full potential. Many women who have been fortunate to attain a certain level of education are not given an opportunity to become gainfully employed. They are, in some places, paid less than their male counterparts for the same position.

Many young women belonging to financially underprivileged families are unable to afford tertiary education and lack the skills and self-confidence necessary to join the labour force and claim decent employment.

Women's Board Educational Cooperation Society, a not-for-profit organization established in Nigeria in 1972 with the mission of fostering the development of the Nigerian woman by empowering her with education and a high standard of work and commitment to participating in the social progress of the country, provides vocational training in catering and hospitality. We have established hospitality schools in Lagos, Enugu, Oyo and Ogun States. The training provides theoretical and practical skills to beneficiaries, as well as a strong work and business ethic. Beneficiaries are also taught entrepreneurship skills so that they can, if they so wish, establish their own business instead of seeking paid employment.

Through our work, we have helped girls from underprivileged backgrounds to become employed in hospitality enterprises as supervisors, chefs, receptionists and housekeepers, among other things. This has helped them to help their families financially. Some of them have undertaken to assist their parents to train younger siblings using their income.

We also provide training to women who have catering enterprises and are interested in improving their skills and taking their business to a higher level.

Women who have chosen homemaking as their full-time profession, or who have decided to engage therein on a part-time basis but with a professional approach, find in the professional home management courses offered in the schools the training to apply management skills such as planning, organizing, delegating, evaluating, teamwork and communication to the family enterprise. Other aspects such as education, preventive health, nutrition and caring for older persons are also encompassed. The aspect of balancing work life and family life is always emphasized.

### **Conclusion**

We believe that, to promote decent work and human dignity for all, employers have to acknowledge the potential of women, treat them entirely equally and adopt policies favouring work-family balance. It is crucial that the contribution of women to integrating the family and society through homemaking be appreciated and reflected in world statistics. We look forward to the moment when the human development index incorporates indicators measuring the social benefits of such work.