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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 American Association of University Women, 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 American Association of University Women supports the 61st session of the Commission on the Status of Women; the priority theme, Women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work; and its review theme, Challenges and achievements in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls (agreed conclusions from the 58th session).

We affirm the accomplishments of the Millennium Development Goals to ensure the promotion of gender equality and women's development and support the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and equal rights for half the world's population throughout all facets of society, economy, politics, and law. The Sustainable Development Goals cannot be achieved without gender equality, and countries must take decisive action to end the persistent global gender gaps to reach gender equality by 2030.

The American Association of University Women, a non-partisan, non-profit organization, has more than 170,000 global members and supporters, as well as more than 1,000 branches and more than 800 college and university partners. As stated in the 2015-17 Public Policy Program, the Association believes:

Global interdependence requires national and international policies against human trafficking and that promote peace, justice, human rights, sustainable development, and mutual security for all people. We support the civil and human rights of all immigrants, including a fair and just path to legal status. We support a strengthened United Nations and its affiliated agencies. We advocate implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action from the 4th World Conference on Women and subsequent declarations. We affirm our active participation in the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women and our commitment to ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

The Association supports UN-Women's efforts and advocacy to achieve Planet 50-50 by 2030, and we urge the United Nations' bodies and Member States to Step It Up for Gender Equality. It is essential that Member States implement the post-2015 sustainable development agenda — and take action through legislation and investment to ensure equal opportunities and rights for every woman and every girl in every country.

We affirm our support of all post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals and urge Member States to fully support Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls:

- (a) End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere
- (b) Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation
- (c) Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early, and forced marriage and female genital mutilation
- (d) Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies, and the

promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family, as nationally appropriate

(e) Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision making in political, economic, and public life

(f) Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed in accordance with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences

(g) Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance, and natural resources, in accordance with national laws

(h) Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women

(i) Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels

The Association advocates for all women to achieve economic self-sufficiency. According to the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2015, almost a quarter of a billion more women are in the workforce today than were in it a decade ago. Women are half the world's workforce, and women's economic empowerment and ability to create economic change are proven components in achieving gender equality.

The Association believes that pay equity and equal opportunity are keys to women's global economic empowerment and that advancement in gender equality cannot be realized without closing the pay gap. We are a leader in the fight to end wage discrimination and open doors for women in the workplace. Job creation and economic opportunity are critical issues for women, many of whom struggle with economic insecurity and wage discrimination.

Through high-quality research, the Association strives to highlight data and solutions on critical issues affecting women and girls. Our recurring publication *The Simple Truth about the Gender Pay Gap* addresses the pay gap in the United States; how it affects women of all ages, races, and education levels; and effective strategies to close it. Women's economic empowerment cannot be realized without closing the pay gap.

In 2015, women working full time in the United States typically were paid just 80 per cent of what men were paid, a gap of 20 per cent. While the number has gone up one percentage point from 2014, the change isn't statistically significant — because the increase is so small, mere tenths of a per cent, it doesn't amount to perceptible change. According to the United States Census Bureau, the earnings ratio hasn't had significant annual change since 2007. The pay gap does not appear likely to go away on its own. At the rate of change between 1960 and 2015, women are expected to reach pay equity with men in 2059. But even that slow progress has stalled in recent years. If change continues at the slower rate seen since 2001, United States women will not reach pay equity with men until 2152.

The Association's findings also indicate that women are the equal, if not main, breadwinners in four out of ten families. Women earn more college and graduate degrees than men. Yet, on average, women earn less than men in virtually every single occupation. By reducing the obstacles hindering fair wages, women have the potential to change their own economic status, as well as that of the communities and countries in which they live. Unfortunately, women's economic contributions are undervalued and unrecognized. According to the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2015, it will take another 117 years until the global pay gap between men and women is finally closed, in the year 2133. We must act now to create a more equitable world.

Beyond advocacy efforts to eliminate the pay gap, the Association engages in research on key issues affecting women and girls and provides policy recommendations for governments, institutions, and civil society. Annually, we provide nearly \$4 million in philanthropic support in educational assistance to women and communities so that women and girls may achieve professional and academic training and reach their full potential.

The Association also promotes women's economic empowerment by working towards greater availability and access to a high standard of benefits and policies that promote work-life balance. Longstanding unequal opportunities between women and men continue to hinder women's ability to emerge from poverty and access options to improve their lives. Research shows that inequalities persist in the way paid and unpaid work is divided between women and men and that women remain the sole caregivers at home, limiting their access to resources.

Unlike the majority of developed countries worldwide, the United States does not guarantee paid annual leave, paid time off for illness or family care, and paid parental leave. Without these policies, balancing the responsibilities of work and family can be difficult for employees, negatively impacting productivity, making recovery from major illnesses or injuries difficult, and in some cases inhibiting the healthy development of children.

Economic development efforts to reach gender equality and combat poverty can only succeed if women are part of the solution. Doing so yields a double dividend: When women are economically empowered, they raise healthier, better educated families, and their countries are more prosperous.

The American Association of University Women is a tireless advocate on behalf of gender equality in all aspects of life. It is imperative that the United Nations bodies and Member States ensure that women receive the legal, environmental, and social protections and the support, training, and human and civil rights needed to achieve their career and personal aspirations.