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Statement submitted by Women’s Intercultural Network, 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

Addressing Unpaid Care Work as a Barrier to Economic Empowerment and Implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women in All Member States

Women's Intercultural Network's mission is to ensure that all women and girls have a voice in their government and economy. It is also critical that their voices be heard during the 61st annual session of the Commission on the Status of Women in regard to the economic empowerment of women in the changing world of work. It has increasingly come to our attention that unpaid care work is deterring economic empowerment.

In the context of our current global workforce, stable employment is disappearing and is being taken over by "increasing numbers of contracted staff and fixed-term contracts with a rise in work/service contracts and temporary work" as stated by the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, 2000. Further, The Future of Work, World Employment Confederation, 2016, reported that global unemployment has increased to 201.3 million in 2014, and since 2007 it has been about 31 million more unemployed.

Further, gender disparities in the global workforce persist. According to the International Labour Organization, women are paid less than men globally as in most countries they earn on average only 60 to 75 per cent of men's wages. This is because they are more likely to be wage workers and unpaid family workers and more likely to engage in low-productivity activities and to work in the informal sector, with less mobility to the formal sector than men.

Economic empowerment deficits do not begin with female achievement, rather the age-old issues women have had to grapple with such as caring for family and children which often amounts to unpaid care work. If women put many more hours into household and care activities than men, this greatly disadvantages them in the workplace. The majority of care work such as cleaning, cooking, and caring for children or the elderly, is performed by women and girls and is usually unpaid. Although this work is critical to the proper functioning of communities, unpaid care work has been largely ignored by economic and social public policy initiatives.

According to the US Department of Labor, The United States has seen increases in college-educated women, most notably during the first part of the 20th century, in the 1970s, and now. According to the Pew Research Center there are more women enrolling in college than men, particularly Hispanic and black women. With the increase in college degrees, there are now more women seeking careers that were once solely headed by men. In 1980, for example, 12.4 per cent of attorneys in the United States were female. Today, women make up 36 per cent of the professionals. Despite the promise this appears to provide, these statistics will shrink if issues like unpaid care work are not addressed.

For decades, the United Nations, and in recent years UN Women, pushed for reforms for unpaid care work. The 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action referred to the unequal distribution of unpaid care work between men and women as a barrier to gender equality. It called on states to establish and increase data

collection of unpaid care work and design policies that recognize its importance to provide equal rights to those of perform this type of work.

In 2013, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights stated that the unequal burden of unpaid care work on women, especially women in poverty, was a barrier to women's full enjoyment of their human rights and this institutionalized inequality needed to be addressed by countries across the globe.

Studies show that reducing a women's share of unpaid care could increase agricultural labour productivity by 15 per cent and capital productivity by as much as 44 per cent in certain countries. Furthermore, the International Monetary Fund states that if women were able to fully realize their market potential there would be significant macroeconomic gains.

Recommendations on the Implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women

In addressing the changing nature of employment and current gender disparities we recommend adopting the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women as the tool for a policy framework that includes the socioeconomic rights of women in city and state legislation. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women cites in Article 11 the responsibilities of the government to guarantee equal access to employment to women and men. Article 11 not only stresses the right to work but also the right to same employment opportunities. Moreover, essential rights for all are also mentioned as the right to free choice of profession and employment, the right to job security, the right to equal remuneration, the right to social security, the right to paid leave, the right to protection of health and to safety in working conditions. These rights cannot be fully realized if women's childbearing will remain on the margins of policy decision-making. Women as mothers and carers must become an integral part of how we think of economic development. Women's rights need to be protected in respect of pregnancy and maternity.

We invite all United Nations member states to implement in full the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women to protect women and guarantee equal opportunities to all regardless of their gender. Furthermore, the role of the Convention in local and international policies is key to a successful implementation of the Millennium Development Goals and the eradication of poverty should become a global reality.

Women in the changing world of work need to be accounted for as equal citizens and partners in economic development in a globalized world where traditional sectors among which the two most important sources of work, manufacturing and agriculture, are in fast decline.

We must innovate to accommodate to changing work conditions and be more inclusive to workers from young to older generations, women and men. Women's work needs to be compensated whether at home or at work. All work is valuable to society including self-employment and unpaid volunteer work.

To address better access to employment, women need training, education, re-qualification, financial loans, but not only economic and educational support.

Motherhood must be respected with policies that reflect it, such as paid leave, protected employment, and investment into care economy. As 2016 report done by International Trade Union Confederation highlights “investing the equivalent of 2 per cent of GDP into the “social infrastructure” of education, health and social care services” it would create the potential to increase women’s participation in the workforce by 25 per cent within the next years”. The study found that both women and men would benefit from increased job opportunities.

Access to work is essential for individual’s well-being and women have been left behind long enough. With the changing nature of work, we have an opportunity to redress the ongoing overall inequality and exclusion of women from decent jobs. For this to be achieved, we need meaningful enforcement mechanisms. Leaving women out of social and economic decision-making will only hinder any economic development with the declining nature of employment stability and raising employment insecurity. All Member States must realize the imperative of effectively implementing the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women to elevate not only women from poverty but also whole families and their children.

Investing in women’s economic empowerment sets a direct path towards gender equality, poverty eradication and inclusive economic growth. Women make enormous contributions to economies, whether in businesses, on farms, as entrepreneurs or employees, or by doing unpaid care work at home.
