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Statement submitted by International Council of 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 International Council of Women, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council, has worked diligently to promote equal rights and the empowerment of women since its establishment in 1888. The Council is steadfastly committed to achieving the objectives of the Beijing Platform for Action and to advancing the status of women, human rights, and the removal of all forms of discrimination against women and girls.

The International Council of Women firmly believes that it is promotion of women to seats, at all levels of decision-making bodies, which facilitates progress toward sustainable development and social justice. The Council also holds the view that bringing an end to all forms of violence against women and girls is a fundamental key to ensure that women and girls will be able to reach their full potential in dignity and equality.

Therefore, the International Council of Women welcomes the focus of the sixty-fifth session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women: women's full and effective participation and decision-making in public life, as well as the elimination of violence, for achieving Sustainable Development Goal 5, gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls.

The Beijing Platform for Action marked the start of an important era in the fight for gender equality; and, since then, progress has been made, but not yet enough. The Council, therefore, calls upon Member States to take concrete actions to achieve the vision of Beijing. Only thus, will women, regardless of geographic location, race, caste, age, gender identity and ability, be able to enjoy their full human rights.

According to the "2020 Global Gender Gap Report" of the World Economic Forum, the largest gender gap remains in the realm of political empowerment. The "2020 International Parliamentary Union – UN-Women Map of Women in Politics" shows that as of January 2020 only 20 out of the 190 countries surveyed have women heads of state/government and that women make up just 21.3 per cent of ministers and 25 per cent of parliamentarians globally. The Council strongly believes that women's full and effective participation in public life ensures the best use of human resources, enhances equal opportunity, increases women's sense of civil affiliation and belonging, gives expression to a wealth of diverse voices and perspectives, and serves overall as a concrete implementation of the value of equality.

To these ends the International Council of Women continues to be engaged in activities aimed at enhancing the knowledge and commitment of its affiliates around the world to promote the political empowerment of women through urging political parties to encourage more female candidates to run in municipal and national legislative elections, establishing capacity-building training programs for development of political skills and tools, engaging in activities to foster a more holistic gender sensitive political culture, raising awareness on barriers to women's political empowerment, and creating movements, networks and digital coalitions to connect with women politicians. Notably, the expansion of women's participation in decision-making in public life correlates strongly with women's franchise and education, in the widest sense of the word. Most of the problems faced by women are interdependent, especially those concerning poverty, emigration, violence, human rights, harmful practices and lack of access to basic health services, to name only a few. Women clearly encounter gender discrimination in politics and this gender gap must be fully addressed in order for women to sufficiently be represented as full and equal participants in areas of political and economic decision-making.

Accordingly, the International Council of Women calls on UN-Women and United Nations specialized agencies to continue ensuring that Member States adopt legal measures and policies to implement quotas for women in local and national political bodies, to include women in planning and decision-making mechanisms for conflict prevention, conflict resolution and economic response and recovery, to encourage women's education for civil service careers and to provide funding for the collection of gender-disaggregated data in order to increase the participation of women in all sectors of public life. Achieving the goal of equal participation of men and women in decision-making will thus provide the balance needed to strengthen democracy. It is imperative, therefore, that Member States mainstream a gender perspective, one that includes the use of gender-impact assessments in all stages of policy formulation and decision-making.

Twenty-five years after adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, violence against women and girls remains a pervasive human rights violation with devastating consequences for survivors, their families, communities and society. According to the World Health Organization, about 1 in 3 women worldwide have experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence in their lifetime. Globally, up to 38 per cent of murders of women are committed by a male intimate partner. However, due to the impunity, silence and stigma surrounding violence against women, under 40 per cent of the women who experience violence seek any kind of help at all, and even amongst those that do, most turn to their family and friends with less than 10 per cent seeking help from the police.

More recently, new forms of violence against women and girls have emerged online with the rapid advancement of technology, including physical threats, sexual harassment, sex trolling, sexual extortion, online pornography and zoom bombing, among others. The prevalence of violence against women and girls also has a significant economic cost, estimated to be about 2 per cent of global gross domestic product (GDP), or 1.5 trillion USD. Emerging data from UN-Women indicates that reports of violence against women and girls, including online violence, have increased during the pandemic; security, health and financial worries create tensions for families already suffering the cramped and confined living conditions of lockdown.

The International Council of Women strongly supports the Generation Equality Action Coalition on Gender-Based Violence, that is now "creating a compelling political compact and driving long-term change to end gender-based violence." The Council therefore calls anew on the United Nations Member States to adopt strong measures relating to the elimination of violence. Such measures include the enactment of laws and regulations, ratification of conventions such as Convention 190 of the International Labour Organization on Violence and Harassment at the Workplace, adoption of a zero-tolerance policy on violence, provision of essential services for victims of violence, prosecution of perpetrators, promotion of prevention methods and implementation of awareness-raising and social protection programs, as well as training for economic independence, and collection of data on violence against women and girls.

The International Council of Women would be pleased to develop and strengthen effective partnerships with UN-Women, non-governmental organizations and relevant stakeholders to promote an integrated and holistic approach to the elimination of violence against women and girls. These partnerships can help to ensure that the issue of gender equality and women's empowerment is consistently addressed and mainstreamed towards the achievement of all the sustainable development goals.

The International Council of Women firmly believes that women's full and effective participation and decision making in public life will lead to effective, inclusive and transformative policies that are necessary for the achievement of sustainable development for the world. As United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN-Women, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, said: "Women's leadership is vital in the face of urgent need to rebuild better after COVID 19. Women and the people of the world are demanding these changes...".
