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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, Armenian Relief Society, Canadian Federation of University Women, Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, International Council of Women, International Network of Liberal Women, Mothers Legacy Project, National Council of Women of Canada, National Council of Women of the United States, The Grail and YWCA of Canada, non-governmental organizations 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

Women's empowerment and its link to sustainable development

The Canadian Federation of University Women joins the concerned voices regarding the time line for global goals to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure prosperity for all as part of a new sustainable development agenda. In 2001, the Millennium Development Goals were hailed by the United Nations as the “world’s greatest promise”, 15 years later, United Nations member states are engaged in a similar conversation with the Sustainable Development Goals. The new, universal set of goals and indicators that United Nations member states will be expected to use to frame their agendas and political policies have set new targets for 2030 — essentially dialling back expectations 15 years. It is unacceptable that all United Nations member states did not achieve these goals within the time frame established in 2001. Lack of intentional responsiveness delayed full implementation of policies and best practices in the critical area of women’s empowerment and its link to sustainable development.

Education features prominently in the sustainable development goals. Sustainable development is only possible through a woman’s access to education. It has impact for poverty, hunger, climate change, violence against women and equal rights. The individual capacity that education builds means women have the skills to engage politically and economically to affect change in their environments.

Women’s empowerment is derailed when women and girls are subjected to violence. The understanding of violence must include non-State actor torture. With no established plan of action against the prevention of violence, the Canadian government spends \$7.4 billion yearly on the consequences of violence. This includes persistent failure to criminalize torture perpetrated by non-State actors in family situations. These failures create a culture of impunity that continue to harm women and girls and violate Sustainable Development Goals, especially goal number five.

Canada is falling behind the developed world in women’s equality, as poverty rates climb for elderly single women and for single-parent families headed by women. An internal report by Status of Women Canada says, Canada ranks in the bottom in terms of the pay gap between men and women; support for child care and parental leave is well below average; the country registers 57th for gender equality in Parliament’s elected members, and lacks a national strategy to halt violence against women. <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/status-of-women-internal-report-1.3214751>

Further to our concern, Sustainable Development Goal #5 appears to have loopholes. In unpaid work, there is no specific mention of elderly women who provide child care for their families and no mention of infanticide and electively aborting girls. Also, there is no provision of health services geared towards women — given that many drug trials are done on men.

In wealthy member states such as Canada, poverty, lack of resources and violence can also affect educational attainment. Indigenous women and girls experience disproportionately high levels of poverty and gender-based violence, and face lower levels of educational attainment and literacy. In 2006, 37 per cent of indigenous women in Canada had not completed secondary school.

Since then, this statistic has changed little; according to Canada’s latest census, Inuit women have the lowest levels of educational attainment, with 47 per cent of

women between 25 and 64 without a certificate, diploma, or degree, followed by First Nations women, 30.1 per cent of whom have no certificate, diploma or degree. Overall, Métis women have better educational outcomes, but still lag behind the general population in Canada.

To ensure that women and girls have access to all levels of education, and to diminish the impact that violence and poverty have on attainment, United Nations member states must:

- Ensure that all women and girls have safe learning environments and homes that are free from violence, discrimination, and systemic poverty.
- Guarantee that violence against women and girls in all of its forms, including intimate partner violence, sexual violence, non-State torture, early and forced marriages, genital mutilation, rape and gender violence as a control mechanism, are consistently acknowledged, documented, prevented, and ultimately stopped.
- Ensure access to quality public education at all levels, including early learning, primary, secondary, and tertiary education, as well as affordable, flexible and quality child care services to enable women to access education opportunities, re-training and employment.
- Implement fully the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, including allocation of equitable funding for indigenous women and girls' education.
- Disperse equitable education funding to attract and retain women and girls in the sciences, technology, engineering and mathematics fields, skilled trades and politics.
- Promote life-long learning and job training initiatives for women with low literacy and numeracy skills in the official languages of the United Nations member state in which they reside.
- Provide direct, long term and core funding to grass roots and women's organizations to support women's empowerment and its link to sustainable development.
- 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.

It is documented that in 46 countries, women now hold more than 30 per cent of seats in national parliament in at least one chamber. While this demonstrates positive gains, there still remains significant barriers for women in politics in 147 United Nations member states. Now is the time for all United Nations member states to increase their actions for the safety and well-being of people and planet.

We urge Canada to take a leadership role in the implementation of gender based policies that encourage and support women's empowerment and its link to sustainable development.

The Canadian Federation of University Women is a non-partisan, voluntary, self-funded organization with over 100 Clubs, located in every province across Canada. Since its founding in 1919, the Canadian Federation of University Women has been working to improve the status of women, and to promote human rights, public

education, social justice, and peace. It holds special consultative status with the United Nations (Economic and Social Council) and belongs to the Education Committee of the Canadian Sub-Commission to. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. Canadian Federation of University Women is the largest affiliate of the International Federation of University Women, which represents women worldwide.

This Statement is supported by the following organizations with Economic and Social Council status:

American Association of University Women

Armenian Relief Society Inc.

Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd

International Council of Women

International Network of Liberal Women

Mothers Legacy Project

National Council of Women Canada

National Council of Women of the United States

The Grail

YWCA of Canada
