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Statement submitted by International Alliance 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 Empowerment of Women and Sustainable Development

The centrality of women's empowerment, gender equality and the realization of women's human rights in achieving sustainable development have been increasingly recognized in recent decades. The recognition is evident in a number of international norms and agreements. The Beijing Declaration of Action provides that the advancement of women and the achievement of equality between women and men are a matter of human rights and a condition for social justice and are the only way to build a sustainable, just and developed society.

The outcome document Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development agreed to by Member states in the Post-2015 Development Summit, which took place in New York in September 2015 also acknowledges throughout the preamble and the Declaration that achieving women's empowerment, gender equality and women's human rights are a prerequisite for sustainable development.

The Sustainable Development Goals are a vast improvement on the Millennium Development Goals, which were essentially a pact between donor and developing countries. The new goals are universally applicable, tackling poverty and deprivation everywhere, leaving nobody behind and holding all countries responsible for taking action. The Sustainable Development Goals are more equality sensible with more cross-cutting commitments to gender equality and a stand-alone goal dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. However, the 2030 Agenda fails to lay out a comprehensive human rights based approach for sustainable development. It also fails to recognize the need for a women's rights based analysis incorporated in the Sustainable Development Goals.

On the one hand women's empowerment needs the building of an enabling environment for the implementation of women's human rights. On the other hand it needs the enhancement of women's skills and capacities as active agents of change for sustainable development. However, in the 2030 Agenda, sustainable development goals, targets and means of implementation do not address systemic imbalances, systemic discrimination and structural inequalities that deny the basic human rights of women and girls. Therefore, the 2030 Agenda does not contribute sufficiently to the creation of such an enabling environment.

Another obstacle to addressing the structural causes of gender inequality by the 2030 Development Agenda is the lack of specific resource commitments linked to the realization of women's empowerment, women's human rights and advancing gender equality.

An example is the unpaid care and domestic work responsibilities that disproportionately fall on the shoulders of women. The burdens of these tasks are the main obstacles for women to fully exercise their rights, as they demand from them an excessive time use and their entire energies.

Unpaid domestic and care work, which derives from discriminatory gender roles, should be recognized and valued. Moreover, costs and burdens must be reduced and more evenly distributed between the state, community and family and in families between partners.

Unpaid care and domestic work is together with violence against women, limited control over assets and property and equal participation in private and public decision making among the most important structural causes of gender inequality.

Unpaid care and domestic work although covered by target 5.4 is not linked to corresponding means of implementation or commitments to legislative or policy change.

The difficulties in creating an enabling environment at all levels for the empowerment of women and the realization of their human rights are produced by development models that support market led growth. These models contribute to the persistence of unequal power relations between women and men. Such development patterns rely on and reproduce gender inequalities, exploiting women's labour and unpaid care work.

We should demand a new development model that is not based solely on economical growth but prioritizes people over profits. We need a new development model that regulates the role of the private sector through binding frameworks that align their actions with human rights and sustainable development objectives.

Concerning the empowerment of women as agents of change in sustainable development the most important premises are the following:

- Work for peace and the elimination of violence against women and girls
- Address health risks created through environmental degradation such as air and water pollution
- Develop infrastructure in transportation as well as in urban planning which takes into account the safety and mobility needs of women enabling them to move freely
- Put emphasis on gender sensitive education which can challenge gender stereotypes
- Remove obstacles to women's full and equal participation in decision making and sustainable development
- Train women in new technologies and entrepreneurial skills and increase their access to credit in order to expand their opportunities in the market
- Identify and address gender equality perspectives in environmental protection and sustainable development.

Unfortunately the follow-up and review section of the 2030 Agenda does not live up to the accountability standards. It is not only completely voluntary in nature but it fails to recognize concrete ways to enable meaningful society participation in gathering data, follow-up and implementation.

Governments when committing to the 2030 Development Agenda must recognize the value in involving civil society and Non-Governmental Organizations in particular women and feminist organizations that can significantly help the implementation of this Agenda and make it a reality.

One important development that is taking place in recent years concerning civil society organizations, in particular women's rights organizations and networks is the closing space for them at all levels from the national to the global.

This development takes place in a context of increasing attacks on human rights in particular the human rights of women and girls.

We should call on politicians to recognize the critical role that women's and feminist organizations and women's human rights defenders have played in pushing for the empowerment of women and girls and the realization of their human rights and gender equality. The attempt of governments to marginalize the role of these groups is an affront to women everywhere.

We call on politicians to show renewed political will and move from commitments to accomplishments. We call on them to adopt a new paradigm of accountability that can make the entire process of sustainable development more transformative and responsive to the peoples' needs. A new paradigm of accountability that will help to build an enabling environment for the empowerment of women as well as to enhance women's capabilities and skills for sustainable development. This new accountability paradigm should institutionalize the participation of civil society organizations in particular women and feminist organizations and marginalized groups in the implementation, reviewing and monitoring of the Post-2015 Development Agenda at all levels. It should provide avenues for both women and men to hold decision makers answerable for their actions and seek redress when necessary.

States should recognize that by participating in accountability mechanisms and hearing from stakeholders as well as people affected and addressing their concerns they are helping to ensure implementation of all levels.

As the United Nations Secretary-General has said, a new paradigm of accountability is in fact "the real test of people-centred, planet-sensitive development".
