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Statement submitted by International Federation of Social Workers, 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 Federation of Social Workers supports women's empowerment within the context of sustainable development as the theme of the 60th session of the Commission on the Status of Women. The International Federation of Social Workers promotes social work all over the world and represents professional associations in 110 countries (IFSW, 2015a).

The aims of the International Federation of Social Workers are to promote social work as a profession, establish national social work associations, and support social worker involvement in planning, policy, and training all within a sustainable framework (IFSW, 2006). The International Federation of Social Workers is in constant collaboration with fellow international organizations for the purpose of endorsing and advancing the tenets of social work including a commitment to promote social and economic equalities, promote the dignity and worth of peoples, work toward environmental sustainability and strengthen recognition of the importance of human relationships (The Global Agenda, 2012). The International Federation of Social Workers' dedication to these goals is reflected in their support and involvement in the formation of the Sustainable Development Goals of 2015 (UN, 2015). Additionally, the International Federations of Social Workers supports the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, as well as the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action both of which propose goals to end discrimination and improve the status of women (CEDAW, 1979; UN, 1995).

Issues:

Gender Equality

Gender equality is an integral factor in the road to empowering women. The removal of gender-biased barriers and the implementation of sustainable programs and policies will ensure long lasting change. Gender equality was not formally accepted at the United Nations until the 1995 Conference on Women in Beijing (UN-Women, 2015). Although it has been twenty years, gender equality continues to plague the world. Women are still subject to lower wages, a lack of education options, and general gender discrimination (UN-Women, 2015). The Sustainable Development Goals represent a global push for gender equality by 2030 (UN, 2015).

Eliminating violence against women is a high priority for the International Federation of Social Works within the context of gender equality. Thirty five per cent of women across the world have experienced some type of physical or sexual abuse in their lifetime. Over 700 million women in the world today were married before the age of 18, and 120 million women experienced some type of female genital mutilation. Trafficked women and girls represent fifty five per cent of forced labour across the world (WHO, 2013). This rampant systemic physical, and structural violence against women is addressed in the nine subgoals of the fifth Sustainable Development Goal (UN, 2015).

Access to Healthcare

Granting all women access to adequate healthcare is another aspect paramount to empowerment. Currently many women lack proper care throughout their lives,

which can result in lifelong illness (IFSW, 2012). Providing women with care options for themselves and their families can provide women with power. A healthy woman is more capable of pursuing education, and career goals, as well as tending to her family. Therefore, eliminating the cyclical structure of poor health is in the best interest of the whole community.

Women's access to adequate health care is an area the International Federation of Social Workers finds to be vitally important. The organization's policy on women states that access to health care is crucial in preventing deaths among women and children around the world (IFSW, 2012). Injury and death related to pregnancy is still an issue deserving of global attention. The International Federation of Social Workers' support of the Sustainable Development Goals demonstrates their dedication to this issue, as goal three is specifically dedicated to good health and well-being (UN, 2015).

The denial of adequate health services to women is a human rights violation. Many women around the world lack options to help them realize their reproductive rights. Global access to contraceptives is another empowering action, increasing a woman's ability to control her body. The International Federation of Social Workers' Policy on Women explicitly supports better access to healthcare to reduce mortality, which aligns with the sustainability goals in place as well (IFSW, 2012).

Economic Empowerment

The support and enhancement of women as economic agents represents a significant step toward female empowerment and a more sustainable planet. The International Federation of Social Workers maintains that eliminating gender discrimination in the workplace, offering equal pay for equal work, and opening up all sectors of the economy to women are vital aspects for sustainable development and the dignity of women (IFSW, 2012). Gender discrimination in the economy takes more subtle forms as well, including hiring bias and the "glass ceiling" often found in male-dominated workplaces, which limits many women's wage earning potential (IFSW, 2012).

Economic empowerment for women requires circumstances in which women around the world have access to jobs, economic opportunity, and a chance to participate in the greening of the global economy. By pursuing such conditions, United Nations member states would progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals eight and thirteen, which include creating decent work and economic growth and to take action on climate (UN, 2015). The Commission on the Status of Women states that a link between green technology jobs and women is essential in working towards a more sustainable future (CSW, 2015).

Education and Training

The International Federation of Social Workers establishes in its Policy on Women that proper education and training opportunities are essential for economic empowerment of women (IFSW, 2012). 2010 data indicates that approximately 61 million primary school aged children were out of school around the world, more than half of whom were girls (UNICEF, 2010). As higher wages are becoming more associated with technological jobs that require advanced education, gender disparities in schools must be addressed.

Women must not only be allowed access to education but also the types of studies which prepare them for employment in more technological jobs. Welfare and social benefits, major factors in the empowerment of women, are becoming increasingly linked with these more specialized, wage-earning positions (IFSW, 2012). The provision of meaningful education that prepares women to actively participate in a greener global economy correlates perfectly with many of the Sustainable Development Goals, especially those relating to quality education, climate change and clean technology (UN, 2015). The pursuit of these advancements in education for women would serve as both a form of empowerment and a strategy for global sustainability.

Summary and Recommendations

Women around the world, regardless of status in life, should be provided the opportunity to thrive and contribute to the sustainable development of our global future. The establishment of gender equality, a reduction of violence against women, access to health care, economic empowerment, and proper education and training for women will ensure that the world's society moves towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals while respecting the human rights and dignity of all women. These tenets are central to the mission of the International Federation of Social Workers. The organization therefore supports the Commission on the Status of Women with the following recommendations on female empowerment as related to sustainable development:

- Implementation of policies that require the removal of harmful or violent practices against women (forced child marriage, partner violence, female genital mutilation, etc.)
- Working within coalitions between the United Nations and civil society to help make access to healthcare a primary concern across the world. Specific action should be made to create equal access to adequate health care, with special attention paid to availability of contraception.
- Economic empowerment and educational opportunity should be pursued by advocating for the global ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action. In so doing, government leaders will need to address the barriers and gender discrimination at a structural level, which prevent women from realizing their educational and vocational goals.
- Support the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative to help advance increased educational opportunities for girls.
- Gender equality must be a main consideration in governmental and civil support of new technological industries, including the clean energy industries. Female voices should be an equal part of governmental discussions to take action on climate change and sustainable development.