



## Economic and Social Council

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### Commission on the Status of Women

#### Sixtieth session

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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 IOGT International, 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.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

This year, IOGT International celebrates its 165th anniversary. In our 165-year long history of service in communities around the world, gender equality and women's empowerment have always been a crucial focus for us. It's this perspective and understanding that makes us both hopeful and concerned. We are hopeful because we've seen considerable progress and vast achievements in gender equality and women's empowerment. We are concerned because we also face major challenges not only to the advances made but also to the health and well-being of women and girls in general.

Last September, world leaders adopted 17 Sustainable Development Goals, including Sustainable Development Goal 5 "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls." The Agenda 2030 is a remarkable achievement. It holds tremendous potential for sustainable and transformative change. But there, too, are massive obstacles. Alcohol harm is a crosscutting obstacle for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, as it negatively impacts 12 out of 17 goals, including Sustainable Development Goal 5.

Going forward, it is therefore of utmost importance for the global community to address alcohol harm with the evidence-based, high-impact and cost-effective measures that we do have at our disposal. The world faces three major challenges for achieving gender equality and women's empowerment. We refer to three global epidemics: Non-communicable diseases, HIV/Aids, and Gender-based violence.

These three global epidemics are disproportionately burdening women and girls, especially women in low- and middle-income countries and they have one common risk factor: alcohol use.

Alcohol is one of four major risk factors in the global epidemic that are non-communicable diseases. Non-communicable diseases are the leading cause of death globally. A staggering 35 million people die every year from non-communicable diseases, of which 18 million are women. Non-communicable diseases represent the biggest threat to women's health worldwide, increasingly burdening women from developing countries in their most productive years.

Secondly, alcohol is also a risk factor in the global epidemic of gender-based violence. Every third woman is subjected to violence at least once during her lifetime. In some parts of the world gender-based violence can be related to alcohol in up to 80 per cent of the cases. And alcohol marketing plays a role in perpetuating prejudices and stereotypes of women; alcohol marketing often depicts women in dehumanized, sexualized and objectified ways. Alcohol marketing fuels gender-based violence and erodes women's empowerment.

And thirdly, alcohol is a risk factor for HIV/Aids because it increases the likelihood to engage in risky sexual behaviour — like unprotected sex, frequent change of partners or violent sex. Alcohol weakens the immune system making it more susceptible for the HIV-Virus and it makes adherence to medication for people who are HIV-positive more difficult. In many aspects of the HIV/Aids epidemic, women are disproportionately burdened.

It is with this in mind that we urgently encourage and support the world's governments to apply the tools of high-impact and cost-effective alcohol policy in our joint efforts for women's empowerment. Alcohol policy measures, such as the

Three Best Buys of alcohol policy as described by World Bank, World Health Organization and World Economic Forum (among others), are crucial tools for the achievement of the potential of the Agenda 2030 in general and Sustainable Development Goal 5 in particular — including 4 of the targets under Sustainable Development Goal 5.

Alcohol policy measures can help bring about transformative change for women and girls, in helping to end all forms of discrimination, to eliminate all forms of gender-based violence, to ensure women's full participation in public life, strengthening sound policies comprehensively promoting gender equality and women's empowerment.

We have the evidence. We have the political tools. We have societal momentum. Now we need political will and leadership.

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