



## Economic and Social Council

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### Commission on the Status of Women

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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 the National Women’s Council of Catalonia, 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

The 1987 Brundtland report analyzed and proposed new economic development policies for meeting the needs of the present without jeopardizing future generations. This report, coordinated by the then Prime Minister of Norway, Gro Harlem Brundtland, coined the term “sustainable development”. The term would subsequently be used in the 1992 Rio Declaration and reaffirmed at the Rio+20 Conference. Sustainable development means the adoption of measures to improve its three pillars: society, the economy and the environment. And women must be key players as we move forward.

### Society

Violence against women is the main obstacle to their empowerment and the sustainable development of our society. Women continue to play an essential role in the sustainability of life. The structural and symbolic violence reflected in the lack of recognition and resources is making it difficult to attain the Sustainable Development Goals. Job insecurity, the burden of care, wage inequality and the glass ceiling place female victims of violence in a situation of great vulnerability. Women previously did 40 per cent of farm work, but the figure has now dropped to 2 per cent. Housing shortages may perpetuate violent relationships. In addition, the legislation on violence and its enforcement often result in greater victimization of women who cannot obtain recognition and protection. The fact that female victims of violence obtain no redress from the authorities is an obstacle to empowerment.

Access by women to education, vocational training and capacity-building holds the key to their empowerment and to the improvement of their livelihood. Public support for specific goals can ensure equality of opportunity as regards education and professional training, especially in areas such as the sciences and technology, where women are in the minority. Women will then play a more important role in research and development activities, for example, concerning environment-friendly technologies.

Health, which is a mainstay of empowerment, is affected by various environmental and cultural factors such as the use of pesticides in agricultural zones affecting women’s health in particular, the shrinking of the Ebro delta threatening an entire population or the range of diseases caused by violence suffered throughout the life cycle. Other noteworthy issues are the bias in clinical and health research that fails to include women and the short shrift given to the gender perspective in data from the Catalonia Health Survey.

In general, we are concerned about the treatment of sexual and reproductive rights in the Sustainable Development Goals, since they have been dismembered and have undergone a paradigm shift linking them to the provision of services and ignoring the crosscutting nature of these rights as a fundamental pillar. It is essential to devise quantitative and qualitative indicators that really measure results and can establish and correct policies promoting the rights and formulate implementation strategies — adapted to the various countries, regions and communities — including participatory and funded accountability mechanisms for the use of civil society. In Catalonia, we welcome the recent parliamentary adoption of a declaration stating that these are fundamental rights and one of the central aspects of sustainable development.

All public policies should adopt a gender-based approach and tackle the structural factors that perpetuate inequalities. They should be based on principles of social justice, always enlisting the active participation of women, promoting effective mechanisms for access and communication and focusing on self-management initiatives and women's support networks. It is essential for policies to be backed by appropriate funding for implementation and evaluation and for inequalities between countries to be reduced, in a context of greater solidarity, so as to reduce poverty in the poorest countries.

### **The economy**

The economic crisis is still a reality. In this context, mention should be made of the particularly negative impact on many women, since the reduction in social benefits has forced them back into the role of unpaid caregivers with no recognized rights, dependent on their partner.

Women currently account for 46 per cent of the active population in Catalonia and their unemployment rate is 20 per cent. The wage gap is about 19 per cent and is wider for less skilled jobs and full-time contracts. After the age of 45, Catalonian women suffer more from wage discrimination. This gap is reflected in lower unemployment benefits and lower pensions for women. Each year female pensioners in Catalonia receive 4.429 billion euros less than men because of this wage discrimination and because of their lower participation in the labour market.

Another issue affecting women is the difficulty of access to decision-making posts in business. This has an important impact on the country's growth and economic capacity. Achievement of parity in the labour market would help to resolve the economic crisis. The main obstacles to access to such posts in Catalonia stem from cultural factors (masculine business culture, women's lack of self-confidence, little sharing of responsibility in the home) and regulatory factors (working hours, difficulty of combining family life and work, etc.).

Entrepreneurship is still predominantly masculine. In 2014, more than six out of every 10 start-up entrepreneurs were men. However, female entrepreneurial activity in Catalonia (5.9 per cent) is still higher than in the rest of Spain (4.3 per cent) and in Europe (5 per cent). The highest rate of female entrepreneurial activity was for women with a higher education (26 per cent).

### **The environment**

The resources of the planet are not inexhaustible. Our model of development and consumption on a global scale is unsustainable, extractive and unfair. The business profits of a few take precedence over life and the health of the Earth and its inhabitants, converting natural resources into weapons of control and domination that favour the increase in inequalities, poverty and social exclusion, thus perpetuating the exclusion of women from the processes of development and their benefits.

Women's participation in management and decision-making is essential for the processes of sustainable development and governance at the local, national and international levels, where they can be effective agents of change. Various studies have found that women, because of their life style and consumption patterns, seem to be more concerned about the environment and have a greater sense of

responsibility for the achievement of sustainable development. There are signs that women are usually more responsible consumers and recyclers and that they use public transport more frequently than men.

Our energy model is based on the use of fossil and nuclear fuels and penalizes the use of renewable energies. Another problem is the agro-alimentary model (genetically modified crops also used to feed our livestock). We must work for food security and better nutrition, promote sustainable, environmentally-sound and local farming and guarantee the food sovereignty of the producing communities.

Catalonians have on numerous occasions demonstrated against the Ebro Hydrological Plan because it constitutes over-exploitation, violates European Union treaties on water, fails to take into account the effects of climate change, endangers protected spaces, and uses herbicides harmful to health (glyphosate) and fracking (an unconventional gas extraction technique banned by the Parliament of Catalonia in 2014).

As always, we wish to emphasize that the issues dealt with above (social, economic, environmental) are more serious when they affect older women, women of different ethnic origin, differently abled women, rural women, women with different sexual options or identities and women who are single parents.

The National Women's Council of Catalonia, which groups 379 organizations, appeals for:

- Adoption in Catalonia of the necessary measures for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals set out in the global agenda.
- Action by the Government of Catalonia, in its international relations, to urge governments to promote the rights of women all over the planet.

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