



## Economic and Social Council

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### Commission on the Status of Women

Sixty-fourth 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 Buddha’s Light International Association, 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

In 1995, delegates and advocates convened in Beijing to turn the principles of gender equality, enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, into action. The Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action is a global blueprint and commitment to achieving equality, development, and peace for girls and women everywhere.

In 1995, Buddha's Light International Association was three years old. The international non-governmental organization, founded by Venerable Master Hsing Yun to advance Fo Guang Shan's practice of action-oriented humanistic buddhism, brought together monastics and laypeople to work toward equality, respect for others, and social progress.

Alongside the people-centered multilateralism of the United Nations, Buddha's Light International Association has encouraged our communities to make a difference and has supported collective action that scale solutions to benefit our environment and future generations. Our programs and services in over 70 regions and countries advance equal inclusive education, promote gender equality, and provide medical services, including maternal health services, to people of all races, gender, economic status, and creed.

Yet, in 2020, we must acknowledge the persisting challenges to reaching gender equality. Young women in the Philippines or South Africa who cannot get into a "good" school or afford to continue their higher education are sent back to their villages, where there are few economic opportunities or where they must marry. Girls in India take care of their siblings and households before they set off on unsafe roads to school, where there are inferior teaching materials and unsanitary facilities. Youths living in the favelas of Brazil lack access to schools and face pressure to join gangs, in addition to experiencing poverty, trauma, and violence. Women remain an underutilized source of talent and labour, due to discrimination, structural inequalities, and existing laws and policies.

Buddha's Light International Association sees education as the key to the empowerment of girls and women. By ensuring and providing access to inclusive and equitable quality education, through after-school programs, training programs, and accredited university education, these particular young girls and women – in the Philippines, South Africa, India, and Brazil – gain control over their lives. They may be able to lift themselves out of poverty, access better employment opportunities, and improve their health and well-being, as well as that of their families and neighbours. Through education, we seek to change the idea that gendered characteristics and capabilities determine the scope of activities that a man or woman can undertake in a given society.

Buddha's Light International Association members are composed of ordained monastics and ordinary citizens from local regions and communities. A common perception is that world religions obstruct women's advancement. However, Buddha's Light International Association believes that there are many adherents of these religions, as well as religious leaders, who draw upon these same faith traditions to combat gender inequality within their own organizations and in the world. We believe that humanistic buddhism can be a driving force for social good and that interfaith partnerships present a public platform that affirms the moral authority that women's rights are, indeed, human rights.