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entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and
peace for the twenty-first century”

Statement submitted by Presbyterian Church (USA), and Presbyterian Women in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Inc., non-governmental organizations 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 Presbyterian Church (USA) and its predecessor denominations have consistently worked for the rights of women in church and society. Women's organizations began forming in the Presbyterian Church in the early 1800s. Our core belief that every person is created in the image of God motivates our efforts to support gender equality and equity.

The Presbyterian Church (USA), its international mission partners, and the Presbyterian Women in the Presbyterian Church (USA), recognize the important roles that women play in sustainable development and ending hunger and poverty. The Presbyterian Church (USA) work plan prioritizes addressing the root causes of poverty, particularly as they impact women and children, as a focus of its work.

The Presbyterian Church (USA) has consistently been an active partner in UN-initiated global efforts from their beginning. Building upon the momentum of the International Women's Year adopted by the United Nations in 1972 and through the subsequent United Nations conferences that followed in 1975, 1980, and 1985, as well as various other kinds of corollary movements, Presbyterian delegations travelled to Beijing and Huairou with a renewed sense of determination in 1995. It was a determination to celebrate achievements, but also to sharpen a global vision and develop a comprehensive action plan for the empowerment of women around the globe.

On the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration, as we reflect on what we have achieved, perhaps the greatest impact that the Church has made has been the advocacy efforts taken through a passionate, collective effort at the congregational level. Our greatest value is working through a faith-based, congregational network and the scope of our members to voice the concerns of women of all ages.

We highlight three of the critical areas of concern where the Presbyterian Church (USA) has made significant progress on behalf of women: education and training; power and decision-making, and violence against women.

In the area of Education and Training of Women, the goal was to address the inequalities and inadequacies in and unequal access to education and training for women by ensuring equal access to education; eradicating illiteracy among women; improving women's access to vocational training, science and technology, and continuing education; developing non-discriminatory education and training; allocating sufficient resources for and monitoring the implementation of educational reforms; and promoting lifelong education and training for girls and women.

Presbyterians, and our global partners, have advocated for education and helped to educate the world since the mid-16th century. In hundreds of communities, we were the first to provide girls with opportunities for formal education. The General Assemblies of the Presbyterian Church (USA) and our predecessor denominations have long supported free, high-quality public education through secondary school. The importance of education is a fundamental affirmation of the Presbyterian Church (USA).

The Presbyterian Church (USA) has been working with partners around the world to improve the quality of education for one million children by 2020 through the "Educate a Child, Change the World" Initiative by strengthening communities' capacity to provide quality education; elevating the quantity and quality of early childhood programs offered by and in Presbyterian Church (USA) churches; training teachers and helping develop curricula; providing support to build or refurbish school buildings; initiating enrichment opportunities for children in cooperation with local

schools; engaging and training leaders as advocates for children's education; and participating in public policy debates around educational issues.

As part of the Presbyterian Church (USA)'s Educate a Child Initiative, Presbyterian Women in the Presbyterian Church organized the May Together In Action Days, focused on improving children's literacy. Presbyterian Women in the Presbyterian Church has created a number of resources for reading with children, tutoring, strengthening community initiatives for literacy and advocating for schools and children.

We created The Katie Geneva Cannon scholarship program that supports Presbyterian clergywomen and college women, as well as other women of color, with opportunities for leadership and spiritual development as well as mission opportunities in the Presbyterian Church (USA).

In the area of women in power and decision-making, the goals were to ensure women's equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision-making, and to increase women's capacity to participate in decision-making and leadership.

Our organizations have worked to create situations in which women are full partners in leadership and ministry; encourage and strengthen cultural diversity and work for the full participation of women of color in leadership; promote shared power and cooperative decision-making within the church and in the world; speak out against and eliminate all barriers created by racism, sexism, and classism; recognize, value, and respond to the insights of those without power; and engage in ministries of justice in economics, education, employment, and quality of life for women both in the church and in the world.

Presbyterian Church (USA) has had female moderators, and recently two sets of female co-moderators of the General Assembly of 2016–2018 and 2018–2020, the highest elected office in the church. Women have been appointed as the president and executive director of the Presbyterian Mission Agency. In 2018, the Presbyterian Mission Agency appointed the first woman of color as the president and executive director.

We continue to strive for gender equity in leadership. More Presbyterian women than men were ordained from 2007–2016. However, there is a distinct gender disparity as to the provision of benefits in Presbyterian Church (USA). While women outnumber men ordained 1,597 to 1,503, men obtained greater financial benefits at 77 per cent to 62 per cent. Presbyterian Church (USA) has been ordaining women to the role of clergy since 1956. However, 84 per cent more than 8 out of 10 ministers, have experienced discrimination, harassment, and or prejudicial comments due to their gender, and 4 out of 10 feel that they have experienced gender bias in hiring, promotion or selection for an official position within the Presbyterian Church (USA).

In the area of violence against women, goals included taking integrated measures to prevent and eliminate violence against women; studying the causes and consequences of violence against women and the effectiveness of preventive measures; eliminating trafficking in women and assisting victims of violence due to prostitution and trafficking.

Presbyterian Church (USA) affirms the treatment of all people as image-bearers of the Creator and to the respect of all of humankind as beings worthy of basic respect and humane treatment. Presbyterian Church (USA) affirms that violence is contrary to God's intentions for the world. While the Presbyterian Church (USA) recognizes that there are endless forms of violence against women and girls, we recognize the structural violence that plagues our societies in the forms of absence of services, inferior education and economic discrimination.

Presbyterians Against Domestic Violence Network (PADVN) welcomes those who promote non-violence in all relationships. This network provides advocacy and resources for the prevention of and healing from societal and domestic violence. Interpreting biblical teachings and responding to the leadership of Jesus Christ in our lives, the church provides a pastoral and moral response through an active program of advocacy and resourcing for transformation. Presbyterian Church (USA) affirms that human beings, created in the image of God, are not for sale. Beginning in the 1970s, Presbyterian Women in the Presbyterian Church and Presbyterian mission staff focused on the sexual exploitation of women. Presbyterian Church (USA) launched the Song of Songs Campaign to eliminate trafficking in women and assist victims of violence due to prostitution and trafficking. Our organizations developed ministries to reach out to the people and has joined campaigns and coalitions to address trafficking.

Our organizations have recognized the critical role women play in shaping a just and sustainable world and promote the UN Secretary General's Unite to End Violence against Women campaign. Faith-based organizations facilitate many decentralized self-development projects and are important instruments of human development. With our knowledge of and responsiveness to local conditions and needs, we are effective vehicles for cooperative action in development and action.

As we reflect on the 25th anniversary, we recognize that much has been accomplished but much work still remains as we strive to achieve equality for women in church and society, and the full flourishing of all God's people. We remind the Commission on the Status of Women of the important role that faith-based organizations have in the advancement of women and will continue to work towards a just and sustainable future for all.
