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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 World Federation of Ukrainian Women’s Organizations, 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

On the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Beijing Declaration of the Platform for Action, Ukraine's women proudly join in the global review undertaken by the sixty-fourth session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women and renew their commitment to the full realization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and other agreements that are part of the United Nations' vision for a fair and just world.

The Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 was the first such international forum for Ukraine in its new post-Soviet independence. Women in Ukraine and in the Ukrainian diaspora joined forces in Beijing and, together with the rest of the global women's community, accepted the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action as the first step in their shared journey towards the advancement of women's rights. At the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, Ukraine is contending with military aggression on and occupation of its territories, and is facing the serious social and economic challenges that accompany war, including military and civilian casualties, and the insecurity and internal displacement of great numbers of its citizens. However, even while facing these challenges, Ukraine is advancing its programmes towards gender equality, including the 2016 adoption of a national action plan for women, peace, and security.

Ukrainian women's and feminist organizations, with the support of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation and together with expert researchers and academics from Ukraine and the diaspora, have collaborated to present a parallel national report on the current status of Ukraine's implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. The writing of the parallel report shed light on areas that need further attention and has resulted in a draft of practical recommendations to secure Ukrainian women's full enjoyment of rights.

The women's community urges Ukraine to join the Biarritz Partnership that was proposed at the forty-fifth G7 Summit in August 2019, where the G7 Gender Advisory Council challenged world leaders to overturn laws that subject women to discrimination and to allot sufficient funding to ensure follow-through on reforms that will bring progress and equality to women and girls. The women's community furthermore urges Ukraine to extend its continued progress on gender reform by adopting a new State strategy for the period 2020–2030, and to bring the women's organized community into full engagement in the planning of work to be done in the next decade.

Ten years after Beijing, Ukraine's 2005 Law on Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men, together with the State Program for Ensuring Gender Equality in Ukrainian Society 2006–2010, laid the early legal foundation for Ukraine's national mechanism for gender equality. The 2005 Gender Equality Law was the first legal tool of Ukraine to define discrimination on the basis of sex and to provide for legal protection from such discrimination. It opened up a path towards gender mainstreaming, or gender integration, by spurring the growth of legislative and administrative measures, laws, and amendments to Ukraine's civil, labour, and criminal codes.

Ukraine continues to strive for a clear and robust national strategy for the advancement of gender equality.

A positive recent development was the creation in 2017 of the position of the Government Commissioner for Gender Policy within the Cabinet of Ministers, in the office of the Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration of Ukraine, which is charged with the general coordination of Ukraine's gender

mainstreaming efforts. It is the highest level of government competency to which gender equality has ever been raised. As a guarantor of a unified gender policy directed from the highest levels of Ukraine's executive branch of power, the position of Government Commissioner for Gender Policy needs to be safeguarded. It would greatly enhance the institutional stability of the Commissioner's position, if it were a position enshrined in law, perhaps by the amendment of the 2005 Law on Ensuring Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men.

In addition, the women's community requests the re-evaluation of recent ministerial-level changes and the reinstatement, in keeping with the 2005 Gender Equality Law, of gender specialist positions, offices, and departments of gender equality that have been cut in the reorganization of the Ministry of Social Policy, parliamentary committees, and within the Secretariat of the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights.

The women of Ukraine, having reviewed the progress and assessed the challenges, have laid out their recommendations, which are consonant with women's priorities globally: an end to violence against women; support for women's economic empowerment; and guarantees of women's full political participation.

An important part of this is the ratification of the Istanbul Convention, the Convention of the Council of Europe, regarding prevention of violence against women, including domestic violence. Ukraine has, in accordance with the convention, criminalized sexual discrimination and defined rape in terms of lack of consent (Article 154 of the Ukraine Criminal Code, 2017). Ukraine is a signatory to the Convention since 2011, but anti-gender actors have hindered its ratification in Parliament, with conservative elements of society balking at the word gender, which has been equated wholly with non-normative gender identities. Ukrainian society still struggles with the idea of accepting those who exhibit difference and safeguarding them with normal civil rights.

Essential to women's economic and political participation is the cultivation of gender-responsive institutions. Thus, following the principles of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women, Article 7 (the right to participate in the formulation of government policy and perform public functions) and Article 8 (the right to represent the government in the international sphere), the women have called on the Ukrainian government to establish a formal mechanism of adherence to equal representation on all levels of government appointments, in the staffing of all parliamentary committees, and in the composition of all official delegations to international meetings.

They call on the government to enshrine in law the formal practice of including women's and feminist organizations into the development, execution, and monitoring of gender policy on the national and local levels. They also call to amend the laws of Ukraine addressing the inclusion of civil society in the formation and realization of government policy, social dialogue, and the work of trade unions, so that women's and feminist groups are fully engaged in the process of the development of legislation.

They furthermore call on the government to conduct annual monitoring and assessment of existing national policies in order to determine their effect on the well-being and status of women and persons of multiple vulnerability, to issue an annual report of the status of gender equality across the nation, and to reinstate this practice in the law of Ukraine on ensuring equal rights and opportunities of women and men.

The women's and feminist non-governmental community, including the network of women's non-government organizations united under the umbrella of the National Council of Women of Ukraine, whose President is a Vice President of the European Center of the International Council of Women, work in full cooperation

with Ukraine's gender policy initiatives as they relate to reforms in all spheres. Among the myriad innovative projects promoted by the women's community in response to the recommendations made to Ukraine by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women upon Ukraine's eighth periodic report, are efforts specifically aimed at supporting Ukraine's neglected rural women. For example, Ukraine's National Council of Women has launched a project training healthcare volunteers in villages remote to medical facilities in order to bring first aid and home-screening for illness to elderly rural residents who are otherwise at risk of being "off the grid" of the healthcare system. Similarly of concern is the fate of Ukraine's growing number of elderly and younger war-time widows. Also receiving serious attention by the women's community is the need to raise awareness about the stubborn traditional gender stereotypes and the stigmatization and persecution of difference that have such deleterious effects for Ukrainian society.

Foremost, however, Ukraine, in the current political predicament, will be in a position to propose models on how to integrate women into conflict resolution and peace-promoting activities. Ukraine's national action plan for the implementation of the United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 was adopted in the midst of active hostilities, and is being tested in difficult contexts, even as the people hope to emerge a peaceful and inclusive society.
