



## 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 US Women Connect, and Women’s Intercultural Network, 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.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## **Statement**

### **Women's Intercultural Network: background**

Women's Intercultural Network is a women's human rights non-governmental organization consultative to the United Nations Economic and Social Council, which has connected women and girls across cultures for collective action on common concerns, on the ground and on the Internet, since the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 1995. Inspired by the Beijing Conference and the human rights agenda that resulted, Marilyn Fowler, Women's Intercultural Network's founder, President, and Chief Executive Officer, returned to California and gave the organization its focus and reality. Since 1995, Women's Intercultural Network, through its programmes such as California Women's Agenda, Calling the Circle, and Cities for CEDAW, has served the human rights of women and girls by identifying those critical concerns that can only be addressed locally at the grassroots level.

Women's Intercultural Network is a network that organizes, not an organization that networks, and thus creates the network that links women and girls across cultures, globally and in United States communities. Women's Intercultural Network creates opportunities for women to come together to build and strengthen skills in professional, political, and economic leadership. Our belief is that all women have something to share and we provide the settings – both real and virtual – for that exchange to take place.

Women's Intercultural Network built the first policy mechanism to implement the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action from the Fourth World Conference on Women, known locally and globally as the California Women's Agenda. Our goal is to create a global women's network that can function on the ground and electronically across cultural and digital divides for collaboration on mutual concerns, with a specific focus of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

Women's Intercultural Network's vision is for a world where women's and girls' voices are heard in all forums, where women sit at every decision-making table, thrive in every economy, and are safe at home and on any street.

### **California Women's Agenda: background**

Women's Intercultural Network took the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action to California by way of the programme known globally as the California Women's Agenda – the first policy mechanism to implement the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action at the grassroots level.

The California Women's Agenda was created in 1996 as the direct result of an assembly at San Francisco State University convened by Women's Intercultural Network to explore mechanisms for involving grassroots groups to implement the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Participants in the assembly representing 125 organizations drafted an action plan for California focusing on the 12 critical concerns identified as essential to improving the status of women globally.

One of the 12 critical concerns identified in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action was human rights. However, from the outset, the California Women's Agenda considered human rights to be a cross-cutting issue that affected all of other the critical areas of concern. All of its work was and continues to be about promoting and protecting the human rights of women and girl children. All of the ideas and action plans under the 12 critical areas of concern that informed the California Women's Agenda's work – including human rights – provided the

foundation and framework for a broad policy agenda which, if implemented, would improve the human rights of women and the girl child, and society as a whole.

The California Women's Agenda's mission is to connect, educate, mobilize, and activate women and girls to become effective civic leaders, catalysts for change, and advocates for social and economic justice. Our core concept is to encourage existing organizations serving women and girls in communities throughout California to create mechanisms and strategies for successful collaboration, organized around the 12 essential topics and with grassroots leadership in every neighbourhood on human rights issues.

For example, many California commissions for women and many individual members partnered with Women's Intercultural Network and the California Women's Agenda in sponsoring events based on the 12 critical areas of concern and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women. The mission is to partner and collaborate with local women's organizations to educate, organize, and take action on local issues ("ThinkGlobal/ActLocal"). Such activities and coalitions have worked to establish a stronger voice for local countries in the national and global community by participating in local rallies and various community group actions.

Most significantly, the State of California held policy summits that included a focus on women and gender. Women's Intercultural Network's presence and participation was a highlight of the proceedings, due to the California Women's Agenda model.

### **Cities for CEDAW: background**

Based on the effectiveness of the California Women's Agenda's model for implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, Women's Intercultural Network was invited to help initiate and partner on the Cities for CEDAW project.

Cities for CEDAW is a campaign to implement the principles of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women – to protect the human rights of women and girls – in 100 or more United States cities at the municipal level by 2020.

The campaign was launched at a meeting in 2013 of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women by the NGO Committee on the Status of Women. The Committee created Cities for CEDAW and joined with two founding partners: the Women's Intercultural Network and the San Francisco Department on the Status of Women. In 2015, the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights joined the campaign to help build capacity and provide educational resources to inform and mobilize individuals to take action in their local areas to promote adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women principles for the Cities for CEDAW campaign.

The campaign is a grassroots effort that provides tools and leadership to empower local women's civil and human rights organizations and municipalities to effectively initiate the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women within their city, county, town, or state. These ordinances work to "make the global local" and protect women and girls by requiring three key components: a gender analysis of city departments and operations; an oversight body to monitor the implementation of a local Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women ordinance; and funding to support the implementation of the principles of Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. These gender studies and ordinances have proven to

effectively address barriers that reduce the quality of life and equity of opportunity for women and girls.

We believe that the Cities for CEDAW Campaign is the ideal local mechanism to accomplish the goals of the Beijing Declaration Platform for Action at this historic moment in time.

## **Conclusion**

As Women's Intercultural Network has helped build the architecture and action plans for women's human rights campaigns for over 25 years, it is noteworthy that it was the first non-government organization with the radical concept that connecting women and girls across cultures and sectors at all levels on common critical concerns can make positive change. Such needed change and empowerment is wrought by and with those women who must live with the policies that are affecting them and their families.

Inspired by the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, Women's Intercultural Network has contributed a strong and meaningful commitment to human rights and to the well-being of women and girls across the United States and the world.

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