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Statement submitted by Graduate Women International, Soroptimist International, Women’s International Zionist Organization, and Zonta International, 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

This statement has been submitted by the non-governmental organizations, Women's International Zionist Organization, Zonta International, Graduate Women International, and Soroptimist International. Three out of 12 critical points from the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, adopted at the United Nations' Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, China, 1995) should be hereby emphasized: education and training of women, women and economy, and women in power and decision-making. This analysis will focus on the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe region.

Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action was adopted by 189 Member States to ensure the empowerment of women around the world. The huge participation of so many countries, institutions, and non-government organizations illustrates the international interest and the need for such a platform to combat gender inequalities. Through pursuing the objectives of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, it is easier to accomplish Sustainable Development Goals 4, 5, and 10.

Education and training of women – the foundation of equality

Education is one of the basic human rights and one of the most important requirements to reach equality. Education is the fundamental setting for every further development towards equality – concerning individuals and society. Equal education should be provided for everyone to meet equal opportunities. It is of utmost importance to facilitate equal education for an equal society. To improve equality, it is important to ensure equal access to all kinds of education and educational institutions, especially in science and technology where women are still underrepresented. Under the prevailing circumstances of today, women still are very much discriminated against in regard to education. Women in every stage of their life, especially pregnant women and young mothers, should be able to have free and easy access to education. Furthermore, it is necessary to train teachers and educators to emphasize girls' and women's education. More women should be taken into consideration in establishing education policies and in decision-making processes. Another future challenge is to improve curricula towards human rights' education, gender studies, and women-leadership.

Recent improvement towards equality of opportunity in education is apparent, but there is still more to be done. The following examples show where there are inequalities that must be eliminated:

- In developed countries, the literacy rate for both men and women is 99 per cent.
- In developing countries, there is still a severe gap, as 86 per cent of men compared to only 75 per cent of women are literate.
- In the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe region, more women than men have earned a bachelor's degree.
- In the European Union, 45 per cent of women and only 35 per cent of men between 30 and 34 years of age have completed tertiary education. Nevertheless, women do not pursue the highest level of education. Women comprise only 29 per cent of researchers in the world.
- There is more equality in some European countries, and the percentage of female researchers is between 45 per cent and 55 per cent. Most of the countries in the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe region have a

percentage of women in the research of 30–45 per cent. There are still some countries where women in research reach a percentage of less than 30 per cent.

Women and economy – women in power and decision making

In the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the participants detected a difference between men and women in access and opportunities in the economic field, especially in power and decision-making roles. In fact, this unequal situation within economic structures lead to social inequalities. If there is no equality in the decision-making roles, there will not be any equality in society. Women are extremely underpaid and discriminated against. They face obstacles to accomplish their full potential and their professional goals, which lead to barriers and economic dependence. These obstacles are caused by societal and cultural conditions, but women also face personal obstacles related to family and childcare, among others. Female migrant workers are suffering from enormous insecurity.

Today, the situation of women has changed for the better, due to an improved legal framework and a policy that supports women. But equality has not been reached yet, and there is still a lot of work to do.

Only six countries have the highest score of 100 in the “Women, Business and the Law Index” by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), meaning women and men have the same rights in a number of selected areas. A decade ago, no country scored 100, indicating they have put through successful reforms over the past years.

The average pay gap in the European Union was at 16.2 per cent in 2018. This percentage has different causes. Men are predominant in management or leadership positions. Only one out of three managers in the European Union are women. Furthermore, it is evident that women conduct the majority of unpaid work.

Especially for young women at the beginning of their careers, but also later, dealing with sexual harassment is an unsolved issue for women to achieve their professional goals.

Conclusion

Generally speaking, gender equality towards education and work has improved, but there is still much more to do. Infrastructures and regulations are getting better, but the greater challenge is to create a real paradigm shift. Too many women are still anxious about improving their education and studying in a male-dominated field, as society maintains the stereotype of distinctive female and male education.

This can be changed by very early education, by providing women with more female role models, offering psychological support to girls, and teaching women and girls to learn and experience how to speak up, become leaders, and scale up the self-esteem. Through advocacy work, young girls must be encouraged and gain more self-confidence. It might be an important new step to create educational programs in which parents can be involved to encouraged and assist in this confidence-building process. Although it is challenging to adjust traditional behaviour that is deeply embedded in society, providing a supportive educational infrastructure from a very early age is one of the most effective approaches for achieving change.

There also is a need for more regulations, so that women can obtain an education at any stage of their lives, particularly when they are pregnant or young mothers. One example would be special aligned financial support from the governments.

Governments, institutions, and non-government organizations all over the world should start to work together in more coordinated ways. Their collective ideas and

data are what governments need. Best-practices models on equality in education and the labour market should be communicated. A country, for example, in Europe with a low percentage of women in research should work together and learn from countries that have a high percentage of women in research. These countries should provide support to other countries, which will lead to positive economic changes. Precise data is necessary for analyzing problems, overcoming challenges, and initiating policy changes.

It is critical in a time of migration to take care of immigrant women and refugees, especially because they have fewer possibilities to obtain equal education and are less protected in the labour market.

Finally, it is important to support women in science and technology disciplines. The jobs of the future will be mainly in these areas. If women are not prepared for them, there will be fewer women working in these fields, which will result in increased inequalities.

Education and the strengthening of women lead to more self-determined women and, ultimately, to enormous societal and economic benefits.

Example from Women's International Zionist Organization

Education is necessary for social change. The Women's International Zionist Organization is offering several empowerment programs for women. The Women's Unlimited Potential Program, for example, is a partnership between the business sector (Microsoft), the government, and the social sector (Women's International Zionist Organization). Women in every stage of their life get an education in technological disciplines. Through this program, women will find a job more easily, gain independence, and improve their self-esteem. Since 2006, the Women's International Zionist Organization has trained 8,000 women with this program in Israel, leading them to a more self-determined life.
