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Statement submitted by ACT Alliance – Action by Churches Together, African Women’s Development & Communication Network (FEMNET), and Sonke Gender Justice 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.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Around the world, women, and girls in all their diversity, are living through multiple and intersecting forms of crisis, including COVID-19, the shadow pandemic of Gender-Based Violence, pushback against women's rights, the climate emergency, racial inequalities, and conflicts. As the 66th UN Commission on the Status of Women reviews the theme, 'Women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work', we call upon Member States for bold commitment towards strong structural solutions for women's economic justice, including gender-responsive social protection systems, and changing discriminatory laws and social norms.

We affirm the commitments made in the Beijing Platform for Action. However, progress towards achieving these goals remains too slow, and uneven. The 25th anniversary review of the Beijing Platform for Action, simultaneously highlighted the existing challenges to the successful implementation and the realisation of the physical, social, economic, and political rights of women and girls in all their diversity. We echo the calls from Generation Equality Forum that catalytic action is required, which includes increased investment and strong multi-stakeholder partnerships.

Women's economic empowerment is a matter of social justice. As secular and faith-based feminists, we recognise that civil society, including faith actors, working for human rights are critical for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2030.

COVID-19 and the Changing Context of Work

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed pre-existing structural injustices and inequalities. The pandemic continues to shape people's lived realities. According to Oxfam International, the COVID-19 pandemic has cost women around the world at least \$800 billion in earnings (job losses), a figure that is more than the combined Gross Domestic Product of 98 countries. Women and girls in all their diversity continue to spend two to ten times more time on unpaid care work than men and boys. This includes providing formal and informal social protection systems for communities, especially during climate, economic and health crises.

We are committed to working for economic justice and rights, which is essential for broader social change. This includes tackling systemic issues, which requires ending illicit financial flows, the establishment of social protection floors (International Labour Organization standards), and reforming family laws. Discriminatory legislation, including religious and customary family laws, continue to restrict women's economic empowerment. This includes laws that restrict women from participating in the formal work force or access financial services without the permission from a husband or male guardian, or place women under male guardianship or require "wife obedience". In many countries, women and men do not have the same equal inheritance, land, or property rights.

Work carried out in the context of the family, home, and communities, are often sidelined in economic policies. A plurality of economic models, including community economies, informal economies, and solidarity economies must be recognised. Local communities recognise the value of these alternative models to reimagine and reshape the global economy.

Patriarchal structures and practices continue determining work opportunities for women and girls. Women and girls in all their diversity continue to experience violence and harassment within the world of work. Damaging social norms, which privilege men, restrict the decisions, choices and behaviours of women and girls. In

many societies, paid work is considered a masculine task, whereas different forms of unpaid work are seen as women's domain. Faith actors and faith communities contribute to shaping social norms, and shape identities, values and hopes. We advocate for the critical engagement of faith actors as well as men and boys as allies in transforming social norms to advance gender equality and feminist principles for economic justice.

Gender, Economic and Climate Justice

Gender equality, economic empowerment and climate justice are inextricably linked. The climate emergency poses the largest threat to human rights. The priority for all countries must be to take advantage of the opportunities created by COVID-19 to fundamentally re-purpose and restructure the economy to enable people and planet centred solutions. We advocate for shifts in policy paradigms, to radically reform the current system. The climate emergency, COVID-19 and increasing conflict, are forcing change. In these spaces of darkness, there is also hope for new models to be adopted. We advocate for equitable, feminist and gender-just responses to the climate emergency. This requires gender equitable participatory democracy.

Civil society, including women's rights and faith-based actors, are critical stakeholders in protecting the environment and working towards climate and gender justice. Their agility is crucial, especially at a local level, where there is capacity to form networks that can coordinate widely, amplify local voices and experiences related to gender, economic and climate justice. Faith based actors are rooted in communities and can be important advocates for transparent and moral regulatory systems and their enforcement, including those of global scale.

Adopting a Feminist and Intersectional Lens to Address Structural Barriers

We advocate for Member States to adopt an intersectional lens and collaborate with feminist actors, which will reshape the world of work. By creating gender-responsive and gender transformative economies, and establishing social protection floors as a step towards fulfilling the universal right to social security, eliminating poverty, and addressing intersecting inequalities.

To guarantee that action is transformative and sustainable, at every level, we must ensure that inclusive and qualitative data informs policies and practices. There is an urgent need for data to be disaggregated by sex but also by geographic location, economic income, disability, ethnicity, migration and religion, to ensure that policies and decisions are formed with a full understanding of the lived realities of women and girls. According to UN Women, across the Sustainable Development Goals, 80% of the indicators for gender equality are missing data; globally, only 13% of States have a devoted budget to gender statistics. In the context of work, evidence-based policies and interventions can address gender gaps highlighted by the pandemic.

We recognise the absolute need to advance the leadership of women, young women and girls in all their diversity, in all spheres of society. Grassroot led feminist movements, including faith-based actors, are critical stakeholders in addressing the power dynamics and barriers that currently exist in the world of work. We advocate for Member States to invest in strategic partnerships, which break silos. As feminist and faith actors, we are mobilising against systems and processes that oppress and marginalise, amplifying and representing the voices of many who would otherwise be neglected.

Recommendations to Member States

- Tackle systemic issues related to the recognition and redistribution of unpaid care work.
- Ratification of Violence and Harassment Convention (ILO C190) advancing decent work for women at all levels.
- Reform discriminatory legislation, including religious and customary family laws that restricts women's economic empowerment.
- Recognise a plurality of economic models, including community economies, informal economies, and solidarity economies.
- Engage with faith actors that work to advance women's rights and gender equality, as well as men and boys as allies for transforming social norms.
- Increase investment to close resource gaps for achieving gender equality and the economic empowerment of women and girls, including investing in social protection floors, public service delivery and tackling illicit financial flows.
- Adopt equitable, feminist and gender-just responses to the climate emergency. This requires gender equitable participatory democracy.
- Collect data that is disaggregated by sex but also by geographic location, economic income, disability, ethnicity, religion, to ensure inclusive and qualitative data informs policies and practices.
- Include movements and organisations working on feminist analyses into mainstream economic policy spaces at all levels, from the local to the global.
- Invest in multi-stakeholder partnerships, including Generation Equality, to ensure there is co-created work and analysis between multiple actors, including faith actors, and ensure that alternative models are rooted in lived realities and academic rigour.
- Adopt an intersectional lens and collaborate with feminist actors, which will reshape the world of work and create gender-responsive and gender transformative economies,
- Advance the leadership of women, young women and girls in all their diversity, in all spheres of society and invest in strategic partnerships, which break silos.
