Commission on the Status of Women
Sixty-sixth session
14–25 March 2022
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 Associated Country Women of the World,
Graduate Women International (GWI), Mother’s Union, National
Alliance of Women’s Organizations, National Board of Catholic
Women of England and Wales, National Council of Women of
Canada, National Council of Women in Great Britain, Northern
Ireland Women’s European Platform, Soroptimist International,
Soroptimist International Great Britain and Ireland (SIGBI)
Limited, United Nations Association of Great Britain and
Northern Ireland (UNA-UK), Wales Assembly of Women, Widows
for Peace through Democracy, Widows Rights International, 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

COVID 19 has provided numerous learning opportunities. On the one hand it provided States Parties, philanthropy and private organisations with the opportunity to work together creatively in the face of unprecedented challenges. In addition it forced society, institutions and individuals to make optimum use of technology and to look towards their own inner health and their local community.

The responses to the pandemic proved that where there is political will no problem is without solutions. It is now incumbent on States Parties to look to other challenges and bring to bear the same strength of motivation to overcome these, working together with partners. The pandemic of violence against women and girls and the climate and environmental crisis, can all be overcome when there is political will.

Recent events proved that speedy responses can also be seen when States Parties or the private sector are willing to take risks for the betterment of humanity. Surely the same timeliness can be brought to bear on issues relating to over half of the world’s population: women and girls.

Over the years the Commission on the Status of Women has reviewed its functioning seeking to better serve its mandate and ensure greater implementation. As a result of the 59th and 60th sessions two resolutions were passed in regard to the working of the Commission. Many of the ideas contained therein have been implemented. In light of the learning from the COVID 19 pandemic, surely it is time to implement these resolutions fully.

Member States can use the Ministerial segments and General Discussions to have a meaningful dialogue on best practice, gaps and challenges rather than what many an objective observer might call a public relations exercise rather than a substantive discourse. The language for this type of interaction exists within the Methods of Work resolutions, but the reality of the first few days of the Commission seem to be fixed statements with little reference to true reflection and collaboration. If the Commission is to achieve its mandate, the opportunities for discussion on the priority and review theme, need to be used in accordance with the policies already agreed and stated many times: meaningful discussion.

The Commission is obliged under numerous ECOSOC resolutions to ensure full participation of Civil Society. The 75th anniversary of the UN provided an opportunity for reflection on the nature of the UN with a number of suggestions put forward by the various consultations that took place. It needs therefore to be recognised that whilst the UN is primarily an inter-governmental entity, no country can exist without its people and any government is defunct without a population. Therefore Member States must recognise the time for denying the real participation of the people is now over.

In our changed world, is it not time to re-orientate relationships and recalibrate in light of experience? Civil society brings to the table the perspective of those who feel most keenly the effect of policies made by international entities and Member States. They also provide expertise across all sectors. How can this vast resource of people, who wish to be actively engaged in the betterment of the world, be included in the deliberations that affect them so acutely? How can they be galvanised to implement the ideas signed up to by their governments at the Commission? How can all protagonists work more effectively together?

We are one human race, living on one planet. Once we view our problems with this lens, it is possible to overcome entrenched positions of Member States, UN entities, Civil Society groups in regard to each other. Without a change in these
dynamics, the best drafted documents will remain but dusty paper. It is imperative that new relationships are forged to ensure meaningful interchange of views to arrive at the most effective conclusions, and that these ideas are translated into positive action across all sectors.

Women and girls across the globe are tired of being treated as a minority. The Commission must take on its mandate with renewed vigour, especially when the significant anniversary to highlight the elements of the Beijing Platform for Action, was diminished due to COVID. Now is the time to ensure the rhetoric is translated into action, working together with all stakeholders.

The National Alliance of Women’s Organisations, with its sister organisations and allies, calls on the Commission to:

• Establish strong formal virtual structures providing a meaningful space for Civil Society to participate in the negotiations;

• Establish an informal virtual space for Civil Society and Member States to meet informally to exchange ideas;

• Ensure existing UN agreed language is acknowledged and strengthened in a chapeau paragraph in the Agreed Conclusions, in order for the outcome document of the Commission to be focused only on the key elements of the theme to allow more time for meaningful dialogue with a shorter zero draft to negotiate;

• Work closely with the geographical caucuses throughout the year to hear from all those usually absent from the table, including those with the most experience of the realities of the themes of the session;

• Work with Member States to establish processes to ensure participation of those without internet access, as women and girls are disproportionally affected by the digital divide in developing countries;

• Support the proposals of the UN Secretary-General to create Civil Society focal points in all UN entities and the appointment of a high-level champion for Civil Society at the UN with a mandate, and resources, to strengthen collaboration with Civil Society, diversify Civil Society participation and support focal points across the system, and implement relevant proposals in the work of the Commission;

• Work more closely with other UN entities to ensure the perspectives of women and girls are brought robustly to the table in all UN spaces, recognising the vital contribution of women to all walks of life and the utter impossibility of achieving peace and prosperity for the world without equality.