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entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and
peace for the twenty-first century”

Statement submitted by International Relations Students’ Association of McGill University, 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

This statement is presented by the McGill Youth Advisory Delegation, a portfolio of the International Relations Students' Association of McGill University. We engage with policymakers to ensure that decisions reflect the diverse perspectives and unique concerns of young people. Our mandate is to increase youth representation in policy-making by facilitating community consultations and collaborating with youth-focused non-governmental organizations (NGOs). In this way, we provide a platform for young people to share their perspectives and concerns, ensuring their input is heard in international discussions and policies.

As we approach the 68th Commission on the Status of Women, we want to emphasize the unique perspective that young people possess on this year's priority theme: addressing poverty, strengthening institutions, and financing with a gender perspective. Youth are often at the forefront of technological advancements, cultural shifts, and global interconnectedness, providing us with a nuanced understanding of contemporary issues. Furthermore, being directly impacted by long-term policy decisions, youth possess a vested interest in shaping policies that not only address immediate concerns but also contribute to sustainable and inclusive futures.

In developing policy to address this year's priority theme, we urge decision makers to consider that intersectionality is vital in policy development for the purpose of accelerating gender-based empowerment. Recognizing the complex interplay of multiple identities and experiences – such as gender, sexual identity, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, ability, and more, is instrumental to inclusivity. By tailoring solutions to women, girls, and gender diverse individuals' specific needs and circumstances, we are able to enhance policy effectiveness and achieve meaningful outcomes.

Community engagement is essential in developing policies for accelerating gender equality. Involving communities in policy development fosters ownership and legitimacy, and ensures that policies reflect the true needs and experiences of the people they serve. Furthermore, communities are capable of holding policy makers accountable, driving transparency and responsiveness. Ultimately, engaging with community stakeholders can empower women and girls, harnessing the knowledge and agency of affected groups who have limited access to the policymaking process, thereby ensuring that initiatives are more relevant, equitable, and sustainable.

Our statement discusses three major areas within the priority themes of the 68th Commission on the Status of Women. We first address ways to mitigate the exacerbation of gendered poverty. Next, we provide ways to tackle gender biases in institutions. Finally, we explain how gender mainstreaming is necessary to financing with a gender perspective.

Mitigating Gendered Poverty

Poverty is not a one-size-fits-all issue; it disproportionately affects women due to enduring inequalities in the rights and opportunities across nations. Levels of inequality are not constant throughout a woman's life either. Gender inequality compounds at every following stage of life, peaking for women between the ages of 25-34, when they are most likely to require access to quality reproductive healthcare and be responsible for young children. Women are less likely than men to be afforded access to essential services like healthcare and education. Care work, primarily taken on by women, is undervalued and often completely unpaid compared to more traditional careers afforded to men. The ramifications of this inequality are particularly significant for youth, as their socioeconomic status is intimately linked to their caregivers'. Indeed, children comprise half of the world's extreme poor.

Addressing inequality must address approaches to connecting women and girls to opportunities, highlighting at-risk groups, and recognising a changing climate. At the heart of this endeavor is the acknowledgment that poverty is far from a homogenous experience, thereby demanding tailored strategies to address the nuanced disparities effectively. In this context, we underscore the critical importance of ensuring equitable access to essential services, rectifying the undervaluation of care work, and safeguarding vulnerable groups, particularly those exposed to the heightened vulnerabilities associated with climate change in high-risk regions.

Thus, we call upon the partners of the Commission on the Status of Women to prioritize policies that:

- Increase access to girls' education and the expansion of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) programs.
- Invest in youth and adult education, including vocational programs.
- Integrate climate-poverty measures, particularly among at-risk groups, into poverty alleviation strategies with an emphasis on gender-sensitive climate change adaptation measures.
- Promote comprehensive support and funding for family planning and reproductive health services.

Tackling Gender Bias in Institutions

Whether it be healthcare, finance, politics, employment, or otherwise, gender bias and discrimination are codified in frameworks, ultimately weakening vital institutions. This results in a myriad of negative consequences, such as impediments upon women's rights and access to justice as well the undermining of their agency, autonomy, and decision-making and financial capacities. For instance the global average gender pay gap in the labour market is 23 per cent, while half of married women around the world do not have autonomy over their sexual and reproductive health rights. For young girls more specifically, this entrenched discrimination often results in inaccessible and dismissive professional, educational, and healthcare spaces.

Strengthening institutions begins with structural reforms. Moreover, it is imperative that women spearhead these initiatives. This means creating spaces for women with diverse backgrounds and experiences in decision and policy-making arenas as well as in areas of leadership roles. It is just as crucial that young girls be brought into these endeavours to empower, inspire, and give them access to avenues of change.

In order for structural reforms to be successful, individuals and relevant bodies need to prioritize effective enforcement and accountability. Effective enforcement is necessary to ensure that advocacy is seen in practice and written reform is actualized. Thus, not only do equitable practices need to be upheld, individuals and policies that perpetuate disempowerment and discrimination need to be met with attempts to mitigate harm and the necessary implications to deter similar future actions.

Therefore, we call upon the partners of the Commission on the Status of Women to prioritize policies that:

- Incentivize political and academic institutions to create spaces that foster the participation of young women and girls (e.g.: internships).
- Support policies that implement substantive representation of women in judicial and policy-making bodies.

- Work with communities and policy-makers to enhance legislation holding individuals who commit acts of gendered crimes accountable.
- Incentivize businesses and organizations to institute policies, workshops, and hiring practices that shift patriarchal cultures and provide more opportunities to women.
- Conduct assessments of levels of gender inequality and disempowerment within organizations.

Financing with Gender Mainstreaming

Financing with a gender perspective fundamentally acknowledges that financial systems should not perpetuate or exacerbate gender disparities, but rather serve as powerful tools to rectify them. One of the key strategies within this goal is gender mainstreaming, a process that involves integrating a gender perspective into all aspects of financial planning, implementation, and monitoring. Gender mainstreaming is not a mere add-on; but acts as a transformative strategy that acknowledges that gender disparities are deeply embedded into our societies, and that addressing them requires systematic change. By infusing a gender perspective into financial practices, we acknowledge the diverse needs, roles, and experiences of individuals of all genders. Beyond tokenism, gender mainstreaming seeks to reshape the very foundations of finance to ensure that it serves as a vehicle for gender equality.

Transparency and accountability serve as the twin pillars upon which gender mainstreaming in financing stands. Transparency ensures that all financial decisions and processes are visible, open to scrutiny, and free from biases or discriminatory practices, such as regular financial audits, public disclosure of budgets, and accessible documentation, ensuring fairness and accountability in decision-making. Accountability, on the other hand, demands that responsible parties are answerable for their actions and decisions, especially concerning how they impact gender equality. Together, these principles create an environment where financing becomes a powerful force for positive change, narrowing gender gaps and fostering a more just and equitable society. In essence, prioritizing gender financing with gender mainstreaming is essential for achieving sustainable gender equality. It requires a commitment to continuously assess, adjust, and improve gender-responsive strategies and resource allocation.

Thus, we call upon the partners of the Commission on the Status of Women to prioritize policies that:

- Conduct gender impact assessments of all proposed policies, programs, and projects to identify potential gender disparities.
- Involve civil society organizations, women's groups, and gender experts in the budgeting and policy formulation process.
- Provide training on gender mainstreaming for policymakers, budget officers, and government officials to build capacity in gender analysis.
- Establish a system for ongoing monitoring and evaluation of gender mainstreaming efforts and adapt policies and budgets as needed.

This statement is endorsed by prominent youth advocates, the World Youth Summit and Young Diplomats of Canada.