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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 United Nations Association of the United States of America, 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

Catalyzing & Championing Gender Equality and Poverty; Empowering Women & Girls with Resources

The United Nations Association of the USA is an ECOSOC accredited movement of Americans dedicated to supporting the United Nations. With over 20,000 members (60 per cent under the age of 26) and more than 200 chapters across the country, UNA-USA members are united in their commitment to global engagement and their belief that each of us can play a part in advancing the United Nations' (UN) mission and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Members of the UNA Women Affinity Group advocate for UN programs that advance women and girls' rights and promote women empowerment on a global scale.

The intricate tapestry of societal progress can be unraveled if certain threads are overlooked. As we endeavor to accelerate gender equality, it becomes paramount to focus on those often marginalized and left in the peripheries of our efforts. Older women, grappling with the combined challenges of ageism and sexism; young women and adolescents, standing at the crossroads of tradition and modernity; refugees and asylum seekers, carrying the dual burden of displacement and gender vulnerabilities; indigenous women, guarding ancient wisdom while seeking their rightful place in today's world; entrepreneurial spirits and the self-employed, pushing against patriarchal business norms; migrant women, navigating the complexities of new terrains; rural women, the unsung heroes sustaining entire communities; women with disabilities, battling infrastructural and attitudinal barriers; and the stalwart female household heads, leading against all odds. Each of these groups is not just a demographic but a testament to resilience and potential. Recognizing and prioritizing their unique challenges and strengths is not an act of benevolence, it is a strategic imperative for holistic societal advancement.

At the intersection of gender and poverty lies an incredibly complex set of challenges that require a gender lens on data-driven poverty alleviation. When unaddressed, it stalls our collective march towards true equality. Recognizing this, our recommendation for gender-specific poverty data is not just another nod to statistical collection. It is an urgent call to action. Only with precise data reflecting the lived experiences of women can we craft policies that genuinely uplift them from the depths of poverty. Such an approach is not just innovative; it is pivotal. Bold impact is derived from insightful decisions, and these decisions hinge on understanding the nuanced dimensions of women's impoverishment. In short, data is not just numbers; it is the blueprint for transformative change.

Institutions are society's pillars, guiding and determining progress trajectory. Gender mainstreaming within institutions is not merely an administrative exercise, it is the bedrock of systemic change. By embedding gender-focused units and regularly assessing policies through a gendered lens, we shift from sporadic interventions to sustained action. The bold impact lies in this shift. It ensures that every policy, every initiative, and every program carries the imprint of gender equality. This turns institutions from passive actors to active accelerators of women's empowerment.

In the grand theater of societal change, financial commitment to mobilize gender-responsive financing is the unsung hero. While intent sets the stage, funding drives the narrative including gender-based budgeting. By allocating funds specifically for gender initiatives and creating incentives for private sector participation, we are not just filling the coffers, we are making a statement - a statement which affirms that women's empowerment and gender equality are not

peripheral concerns but central to our development agenda. Boldness in funding is a clarion call, signaling our unswerving commitment to the cause.

Impactful change germinates at the grassroots. By expanding partnerships with grassroots organizations and non-government organizations (NGOs), we tap into a reservoir of ground-level insights, localized strategies, and community trust. This is not just about collaboration, it is about harnessing collective wisdom. Bold impact emerges when top-down policy directives meet bottom-up community wisdom. In this confluence lies the magic formula for addressing and dismantling barriers to poverty, women's empowerment and gender equality.

Ignorance is the most significant barrier to progress. Comprehensive education and training on gender perspectives aims to combat this ignorance. By instilling gender studies in curricula and sensitizing officials, we are not just disseminating information; we are reshaping mindsets. Such an endeavor holds the promise of bold impact because when stakeholders—from policymakers to the general public—view the world through a gendered lens, they become catalysts for change. They champion the cause, break down traditional barriers, and build a world where gender equality is the norm, not the aspiration.

Human trafficking, along with poverty, crises, conflict, and climatic disasters, carries a profoundly gendered dimension. Women and girls are disproportionately affected by this problem, both in terms of their numbers and severity of exploitation. For women and girls to achieve gender equality and to be empowered, it is essential that the root causes of human trafficking - including poverty and institutional weaknesses - are addressed from a gender perspective. Through poverty alleviation, institutional strengthening, and gender-responsive financing, we can not only combat human trafficking but also create an environment where women and girls can thrive without being exploited. Moreover, it emphasizes the need for targeted, gender-inclusive strategies in combating trafficking and its associated challenges, which are in line with the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW68) Priority Theme.

Recommendations

- The Fourth World Conference on Women and the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly emphasized gender equality for holistic development. Poverty eradication remains central to gender equality. Our recommendation is that member states develop and implement gender-sensitive data collection tools to identify women's specific needs and challenges; based on this, design targeted interventions that address the root causes of poverty for women while ensuring resources are equitably allocated to women's needs and priorities.
- Adequate financing, especially from a gender perspective, is pivotal for gender equality. We recommend member states advocate for and secure increased financial commitments and donors specifically earmarked for gender equality initiatives. Additionally, prioritize the establishment of a gender-responsive budgeting system across all UN mechanisms/agencies to ensure equitable allocation and utilization of resources for women's empowerment.
- The Fourth World Conference on Women recognized the role of non-governmental actors in promoting gender equality. We recommend member states increase partnerships with grassroots organizations and NGOs that understand local challenges and solutions related to women's empowerment. By leveraging their insights and capabilities, ensure that UN initiatives resonate with and address the real-life challenges faced through the experiences of women and/or experts, especially those in poverty.

- Education is a powerful tool to break down barriers and change mindsets. We recommend member states develop and roll out comprehensive training programs for policymakers, civil servants, and other key stakeholders on gender perspectives. These programs should include the importance of gender equality and gender mainstreaming strategies. This will ensure that those in decision-making positions are equipped to prioritize and champion gender equality in their respective domains.
- We strongly recommend that UN member states continue to prioritize the establishment of emergency comprehensive frameworks to combat human trafficking, particularly in regions plagued by crises, conflict, and climatic disasters. These frameworks should not only focus on punitive measures against traffickers but also on preventive measures like community education, strengthening local economies, and offering support systems for victims. Collaboration with lived experienced experts, civil society and NGOs, especially those with gender expertise, is crucial to ensure the gendered aspects of all forms of trafficking are addressed.

Incorporating these recommendations will not only accelerate gender equality and empower all women and girls. They will also resonate with the foundational principles of the Fourth World Conference on Women and the subsequent special session of the General Assembly. The UNA-USA Women's Affinity Group, with its influence and reach, can play a pivotal role in ensuring these recommendations translate into actionable strategies and tangible outcomes.
