



## Economic and Social Council

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### Commission on the Status of Women

Sixty-fourth session

9–20 March 2020

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 Graduate Women International (GWI), and Women Graduates - USA, Inc., 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.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

The main focus of the Commission on the Status of Women will be on the review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly.

Women Graduates-USA, Inc advocates for universal human rights, including gender equality across all twelve critical areas of concern outlined by the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. We focus on refugee and migrant women and girls; education for women and girls; violence against women; women, peace and security.

Women Graduates-USA, Inc. points out that the progress in some of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action's critical areas of concern has been unacceptably slow and uneven with a regression in women's rights in many cases. Armed conflicts and humanitarian disasters are reasons for such regression, but women's and girls' rights have also suffered as some country leaders do not believe in gender equality or understand that all human rights are inalienable.

A review of public expenditures in recent years shows an underinvestment in gender equality as envisioned and enshrined in the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and a reduction in development assistance.

Obstacles identified in the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals namely, the global financial crisis of 2008–2009, the grossly uneven distribution of wealth in the world, wars, entrenched gender and social inequalities within formal and informal institutions, patriarchy, and environmental degradation and climate change have persisted, significantly slowing down the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

To be fair, there is a growing awareness that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development cannot be accomplished without gender equality and without women's access and equal treatment in social, economic and environmental justice. While this awareness has been slow to grow and seemingly eludes many global and national leaders, the relentless work by civil society, subject matter experts and activists has been successful in convincing global decision-makers of the centrality of substantive gender equality for a sustainable future. This bodes well for the accomplishment of the Sustainable Development Goals and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, although time is of the essence.

Women Graduates-USA, therefore, calls on all Member States, especially the United States of America, to invest in and act simultaneously in all Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action critical areas of concern because of the significant interconnections and synergies that speak to the indivisibility and interdependence of human rights, particularly women's and girls' rights.

Women Graduates-USA, Inc draws attention to worsening issues within the following areas of critical concern and emphasizes the need for collective, immediate and decisive actions on the part of all Member States:

- Education leading to full inclusion of women and girls in a country's economy is key to accomplishing the objectives of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Education empowering women and girls is central to improving health outcomes, reducing violence, preserving the environment, mitigating climate change, reducing conflict, making lasting peace and fuelling economies.

- Poverty remains the largest barrier to women's and girls' educational and employment gains. We call on country governments to develop macroeconomic plans prioritizing and enabling women's and girls' education and to apply gender analysis when implementing all education-related policies.

Women Graduates-USA calls attention to the plight of people fleeing from wars, conflicts and environmental crises and requests support for the Global Compact on Refugees. The vast majority of these people have remained in makeshift camps many for more than ten years and for the most part, have been deprived of basic human rights, rights that can only be restored if they are able to, once more, live purposefully and with dignity.

Women and girls comprise more than half the worldwide refugee population. Women Graduates-USA, Inc draws attention to the education needs of refugee women and girls who experience multiple and intersecting vulnerabilities including age, minority status, religion, disability and socioeconomic standing.

Ambivalence and delay in accepting refugees on the part of some governments has already taken its toll on refugee women and girls in terms of missed education and employment opportunities, disruptions of family and community life and discontinuity in relationships essential to mental, physical welfare and empowerment and self-actualization. Prolonged deprivation of the right to education and full inclusion in society threatens to exponentially increase the risk of gender inequality and social, economic and environmental in the future.

Women Graduates-USA, Inc calls upon all country governments to develop expeditious gender and vulnerability-responsive environments throughout the difficult process of repatriation, relocation and integration of refugee women and girls.

While Women Graduates-USA, Inc applauds some decline in extreme poverty due to some measure of the Millennium Development Goal accomplishments, an unchecked global economy has been responsible for the unequal distribution of wealth and a deepening financial and gender divide. The rich are richer still and the poor more abjectly downtrodden.

Poverty and the inability to maintain a dignified standard of living has, in many countries, given rise to fundamentalist patriarchal perspectives and practices that marginalize women and girls in households and communities causing them to be killed, married in childhood or victimized by human traffickers.

Porous country borders in a free market global economy facilitating the transportation of goods and services have enabled traffickers to transport human beings across country borders accelerating the growth of trade in human beings.

Women Graduates-USA calls on all country governments to recognize human trafficking as the ultimate form of violence against women and girls that systematically deprives them of their "personhood." Poverty, resulting in the sale of women and girls by their families, can be pre-empted by preventive measures by governments that provide families with basic public goods like education, healthcare, safe living conditions, access to a reasonable standard of living and social safety nets.

Women Graduates-USA, Inc calls upon country governments to strengthen criminal legislation and dedicate resources to law enforcement and criminal justice systems to stop illegal transportation of human beings across country borders and punish traffickers and non-state torturers to the full extent of the law.

Our deep concern extends to the victims of trafficking. We strongly advocate for legislation that provides for their rights to personal safety, asylum, financial and

other support and meaningful rehabilitation so that they may enact a future of their choosing.

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action called for an increase in women's participation in decision-making in conflict resolution and promotion of non-violent forms of conflict resolution. Despite conclusive evidence of women's contributions to fostering peace, women remain underrepresented in peace-making, peace and nation-building decision-making processes. Conflict zones remain more dangerous for women and girls and in protracted crises around the globe. Women and girls continue to be raped repeatedly, harassed, sold into sexual slavery and forced marriage.

Women Graduates-USA, Inc urges the protection of women and girls in these crisis areas to be protected by non-violent measures, proven to be more effective than armed measures in assuring the safety of civilians. The role of military spending and the sale and availability of weapons of war remains one of the root causes of conflicts and calls upon all country governments to stop the legal and illegal sale of weapons and to reduce military spending in favour of spending on development priorities like education, healthcare, food, water and environmental security, affordable housing and infrastructure supporting equitable economic growth within their respective countries.

Women Graduates-USA, Inc calls upon all country governments to develop and expand their policies on women, peace and security for the meaningful inclusion of women in all peace processes as agreed to in Security Council Resolution [1325 \(2000\)](#), forcefully emphasizing that it is crucial to adequately finance these policy implementations.

Given the linkages among areas of critical concern and our interconnectedness within a global economy, meaningful accomplishment of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action requires a comprehensive, global approach. We understand the magnitude of the task of harnessing political will and acquiring financial and other resources, including uniform data collection, analysis and meticulous measurement of outcomes in the accomplishment of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Women Graduates-USA, Inc draws attention to the urgency to act in simple common-sense ways, in each of the twelve areas that will, at present and in the immediate future, save women's and girls' lives.

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