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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 Fondazione Proclade Internazionale – Onlus, 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

Fondazione PROCLADE Interazionale-onlus, a foundation committed to promoting comprehensive social development and gender equity globally, submits this statement as part of our network of non-governmental organizations collaborating with the Claretian Missionaries. Our statement aligns with the evaluation of current challenges affecting the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and progress toward the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Drawing from experiences shared across our projects in 21 countries, including Angola, Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Cameroon, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guatemala, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Mexico, Nigeria, Peru, Sri Lanka, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Uganda, Uruguay, and Venezuela, we focus on three critical areas of Strategic Objectives and Actions of the declaration: women and poverty, education and training of women, and women's health.

Poverty and Gender Inequality

Despite decades of effort, women continue to face significant barriers due to the structural causes of poverty and inequality. Many women feel overwhelmed, stressed, and exhausted due to the disproportionate burden of domestic and caregiving responsibilities, including child and elder care, housework, and income generation. This double burden of managing both domestic and professional responsibilities has worsened following the pandemic, especially for those combining household chores with telecommuting and childcare. The resulting emotional impacts, including frustration, resentment, and feelings of undervaluation, often affect women's mental health, leading to depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem.

While some government and community programs aim to support women in income generation, their effectiveness varies widely due to funding issues, bureaucracy, and lack of accessibility. Programs like Brazil's Bolsa Família have shown positive results, yet many initiatives fail to offer holistic or long-term support, leaving women to face systemic problems. In Hong Kong, for instance, financial assistance programs prove insufficient against rising living costs, especially in housing.

Government efforts must focus on improving accessibility to affordable childcare, mental health services, and affordable housing. Greater involvement of women in policymaking is crucial, especially at the grassroots level, to develop sustainable solutions that genuinely alleviate poverty and inequality.

Education and Vocational Training

Access to education and vocational training for women remains insufficient, particularly in fields like technology, engineering, and skilled trades. In many regions, women lack opportunities to acquire digital literacy and leadership skills, both essential for their empowerment and workforce participation.

Educational systems must focus on modernizing curricula to include job-oriented training, reproductive health education, and business skills development. The importance of soft skills such as emotional intelligence and teamwork, which are critical for success in professional and social environments, cannot be overstated.

Digital literacy programs should be expanded, particularly in marginalized communities, to bridge the skills gap. Partnerships between governments and private sectors can enhance the provision of technical training, ensuring that women have the tools they need to succeed in modern job markets. Furthermore, sustained pathways

for life-long learning are essential for empowering women to thrive in all areas of life.

Health and Gender Equity

Women in rural areas face significant barriers to accessing healthcare due to a lack of infrastructure, personnel, and resources. Economic and cultural barriers further compound the difficulties, limiting access to essential maternal and postnatal care. In many cases, rural women are forced to rely on traditional midwives, increasing maternal health risks.

Urban women, while having better access to healthcare, often experience overcrowded public health centers, with long waits, or the high costs of private healthcare. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach: improving infrastructure, training medical personnel, and offering affordable healthcare services, particularly in conflict-affected and rural regions.

Environmental challenges such as pollution, exposure to harmful chemicals, and the effects of climate change also disproportionately affect women in marginalized communities. These health risks, coupled with limited access to clean water and proper sanitation, pose a severe threat to women's overall well-being, particularly for pregnant women and those working in hazardous environments.

Our Initiatives

PROCLADE International responds to these challenges through various initiatives. Our economic development programs implement microfinance and income-generating projects, providing women with access to credit, savings programs, and financial training. Through our educational animation, we offer vocational training and workshops focusing on women's rights and empowerment. Our health initiatives promote awareness about gender equality and women's rights, with a focus on natural medicine and preventive health.

Based on our experience, we recommend that States and Governments take the following actions to improve the living conditions of women and girls:

- **Implement Equal Pay and Employment Policies:** Adopt and rigorously enforce laws that guarantee equal pay and non-discrimination in hiring and promotion practices. Promote the inclusion of women in all economic sectors and provide incentives to companies that implement effective gender equality policies.
- **Invest in Social and Care Infrastructure:** Develop and fund comprehensive childcare and eldercare services to alleviate the disproportionate household burden on women. This investment will enable women to participate more fully in the labor market and pursue professional development opportunities.
- **Expand Microfinance and Business Support:** Facilitate women's access to credit, microfinance, and savings programs, particularly for entrepreneurs. Provide comprehensive training in financial management and business skills to strengthen women's economic autonomy and their ability to contribute to community development.
- **Enhance Technical and Vocational Training:** Increase access to technical and vocational education for women, especially in fields such as technology, engineering, and digital skills. Partner with the private sector to provide training in emerging fields and promote job opportunities for women in diverse sectors.
- **Strengthen Healthcare Access:** Develop sustainable health programs ensuring equitable access to medical care, especially in rural areas. This includes improving health infrastructure, training medical personnel, and providing

affordable transportation to health facilities. Particular attention should be given to maternal health services, including prenatal and postnatal care.

- **Address Environmental Health Challenges:** Implement targeted programs to mitigate environmental health risks faced by women, particularly in areas affected by pollution and climate change. Prioritize access to clean water, improved sanitation, and protection from environmental hazards in vulnerable communities.
- **Create Community Support Networks:** Establish and strengthen programs that promote the creation of women's support networks, savings groups, and cooperatives. Partner with non-governmental organizations to offer integrated social services, health support, and economic empowerment initiatives at the community level.
- **Leverage Digital Technologies:** Invest in providing digital literacy training and access to technology for women, particularly in remote areas. This initiative should focus on bridging the digital divide and preparing women for the evolving job market through skills development in information technology and digital platforms.
- **Promote Women's Participation in Decision-Making:** Actively encourage and facilitate the inclusion of women in public policy formulation and decision-making at local, national, and international levels. Establish representation quotas and implement leadership training programs to ensure meaningful participation in governance structures.
- **Integrate Gender Sensitivity in Education:** Reform educational systems to address gender stereotypes and cultural biases from early childhood through higher education. Develop curricula that promote gender equality, include comprehensive sexual education, and provide training on women's rights and protection against gender-based violence.

The implementation of these recommendations must incorporate an ethnic and intergenerational perspective, ensuring that interventions are culturally sensitive and address the needs of women and girls across different age groups and backgrounds. By addressing these interconnected challenges comprehensively, we can accelerate progress toward fulfilling the Sustainable Development Goals and promoting inclusive and sustainable social development for all.
