



# Economic and Social Council

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## Commission on the Status of Women

Sixty-ninth session

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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 Zonta International, 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.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

Zonta International, a leading global organization of more than 25,000 individuals in 64 countries working together to build a better world for women and girls, presents to the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women the following statement for consideration of the Commission in its deliberations on reviewing and assessing the current challenges that affect the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action's twelve points, the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls and the Beijing Platform's contribution toward the full realization of the 2030 Agenda for the Sustainable Development from a gender perspective. Thirty years have passed since the Fourth World Conference on Women and adoption of the Beijing Platform. In that time, women and girls have endured decades of fluctuating progress and frustrating setbacks in the fight for gender equity. The time for talking is over; it is time for action.

UN Women estimates that at the current rates it will take an additional 137 years to end extreme poverty among women; 1 in every 8 women and girls aged 15 to 49 was subjected to sexual and/or physical violence by an intimate partner in the previous year; 54 per cent of countries do not have laws that base the legal definition of rape on the lack of freely given consent; and at the current rate it will still take an estimated 300 years to end child marriage. These are only some of the glaring statistics that address the stalled progress of the Platform for Action and support how critical it is for an assessment on the continued work to be done.

To address the twelve points of the Platform for Action, the global community must recognize the discrepancies of quality education at all levels, advocate for women's rights as a human right at a local and national governmental level and ensure a gender-sensitive equal voice when the topic of climate change is discussed.

### **Recognizing the discrepancies of quality education at all levels**

Girls' access to quality education at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels is essential to their ability to realize their full potential and enjoy long-term economic security. However, millions of girls remain out of school altogether and the lack of secondary schools in rural areas means girls often live very far from the nearest school. The points of action: "Women and poverty," "Education and training of women," and "the girl child" all revolve around one common focus: education.

UN Women estimates that more than 129 million girls are out of school, while 340 million women and girls will live in extreme poverty by 2030, and close to 1 in 4 will experience moderate or severe food insecurity. Girls need to be able to travel safely to and from school, have the proper support to continue their education, and school facilities must include sex-segregated toilets and washing facilities, complying with Sustainable Development Goals targets 4.A and 6.2, so girls do not miss school once they begin menstruating.

Globally, one in every five girls is formally married or in a union before reaching the age of 18, and girls with no education are three times as likely to marry by 18. Therefore, married girls need to be allowed and encouraged to return to school and should be supported with catch-up classes and childcare services if needed to better their lives and hopefully educate future generations about child marriage as well. Educated female populations substantially increase a country's productivity and fuel economic growth, so a structure that encourages girls and women to continue their education would allow opportunities to expand health resources, support resources especially when it comes to child marriage, and stimulate economic growth within a country.

Zonta International calls on Member States and the United Nations to recognize the discrepancies of quality education at all levels by:

- Addressing barriers to girls' education, including strong cultural norms that favor boys' education and delegate household obligations to girls, inadequate sanitation facilities in schools, unsafe school environments, and child marriage, which ultimately would create a safe space for raising the voices of female adolescents to become role models for future generations.
- Ensuring girls' access to quality education at all levels, improving retention rates, supporting interventions that encourage girls to enroll in school and make the transition from primary to secondary school, and addressing the unique needs of young married girls to allow them to return to school and complete their education.
- Granting girls' opportunities in higher education, specifically science, engineering and mathematics, technology awareness and aptitude, and training that would help them to fulfil career requirements and contribute to the economic structure of their communities.

#### **Advocate for women's rights as a human right at a local and national governmental level**

In order to address the following Platform for Action points: "Human rights of women," "Women and armed conflict," "Institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women," "Women and the economy," and "Women in power and decision-making" the global community must acknowledge the effects of instituting women in roles of leadership and how that can make long-term instrumental changes to violence against women and gender equality. According to UN women, unless progress accelerates, plans will fall short of achieving gender equality by 2030. With limited data on Sustainable Development Goal 5, much remains unknown about gender inequalities, rendering women's experiences invisible in policies and decision-making. In 51 per cent of countries, there is at least one restriction preventing women from doing the same jobs as men. Women are also often denied leadership and decision-making roles in politics and the private sector. In fact, globally women only held 1 in every 3 seats in local governments in 2023. By giving women equal rights through economic independence and decision-making positions, the global community can set an unprecedented action to pull women into gender equality in leadership, armed conflict solutions, and economic decision-making.

According to Human Rights Watch, women and girls throughout history have been targeted for violence in wartime. They have also been excluded from conflict prevention and resolution efforts. Women and girls often lack the support they need from high-level leadership committed to integrating women's rights, which essentially leaves them out of decision-making solutions. By including women within leadership roles in the military, local and national government and the private sector, policies, institutionalized mechanisms and decisions can be created to prevent women as targets of violence and bring them to an equal standard to men in government and the private sector.

Zonta International calls on Member States and the United Nations to advocate for women's rights as a human right at a local and national governmental level by:

- Strengthening care policies, services, jobs and infrastructure to recognize, reduce and redistribute the unpaid care and domestic work burden held by women.

- Improving women's access to technology such as mobile phones, internet and AI applications to boost economic independence for job training/security, entrepreneurial skills, higher education and career leadership.
- Encouraging legal frameworks and land rights for women and investing in training in fields of leadership, business ownership, science, technology, engineering and math for women.

**Ensure a sensitive, gender equal voice when the topic of climate change is discussed**

The points of action from the Platform for Action: "Women and Health," "Violence against women," and "Women and the Environment" all can be addressed in this one crucial underlying topic: climate change. Climate change includes social and intergenerational injustice; those who have contributed least to the climate change crisis are the most impacted. Girls face discrimination and abuse based on their gender. Poverty, ethnic background and disabilities may multiply these challenges. Climate change exacerbates these issues. According to UN Women, in the last year, women and girls were among the worst affected by climate change given pre-existing inequalities and heightened vulnerabilities, particularly those in rural areas. To ensure a gender-just transition towards an environmentally sustainable future, gender-responsive policies are needed to build women's resilience to climate impacts.

Millions of people have already lost their homes and livelihoods due to extreme weather events caused by climate change. When extreme heat, drought, fires, storms, floods, and sea-level rise disrupt lives, women are less likely than men to recover. Systemic gender inequality has led to women having fewer resources and choices than men, and women then are less able to rebuild their lives due to the widening gender gaps. According to the World Health Organization, during natural disasters, women and girls are more likely to be severely affected or killed as a result of their roles and responsibilities in society. Climate change undermines food security in developing countries. It is largely the responsibility of women and girls to search for water and as the distances for water increases, so does the risk for women and girls to gender-based violence. Climate change and climate-related natural disasters also increase the risk of girls being forced to marry.

Zonta International calls on Member States and the United Nations to ensure a sensitive, gender equal voice when the topic of climate change is discussed by:

- Preparing communities for the possibility of climate disaster with climate readiness plans and creating an awareness of the consequences.
- Upholding the principles of climate justice agreed to in the Paris Agreement and ensuring that the most marginalized groups do not bear the brunt of the climate crisis.
- Recognizing the unique needs of women and girls and prioritizing their health and safety with response plans, specifically those related to gender-based violence.
- Arranging education for girls and supporting girls' access to education, which should include education on climate change and recognizing the social and economic factors aggravated by climate change.

Since 1995, there have been many policies and growing societal awareness in line with the twelve key action points of the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action; however, there is a dire need for an assessment on these points. The global community needs to address and prioritize the severity of some of the points including

an analysis of the successful work that has already been done if we are to make significant and sustained progress in the fight for gender equality.

Zonta International calls on the global community to streamline its focus on women and girls' continued education while urging governments and the private sector to appoint more women to decision-making positions and address the major crisis of climate change with the disproportionate effects it is having on the health and safety of women and girls. These issues are in line with the past Commission on the Status of Women sessions and have been addressed by Zonta International and many other non-governmental organizations who share our commitment to a gender-equal world. However, it is only when we learn from the accomplishments and failures from the past 30 years that we are able to have the means to move forward in a purposeful and successful path to gender equality. Women and girls cannot wait any longer for equality. They need bold, decisive action now.

Endorsed by:

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