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

Statement submitted by Women in Distress Organisation, 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

Despite notable progress since the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995, significant challenges persist in achieving full gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. In this statement, we aim to address key thematic issues and outline actions needed to overcome barriers to gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Persistent Gaps in Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

Despite global commitments to gender equality, progress remains uneven, with many women and girls still facing systemic discrimination. We highlight the continuing disparities in access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities for women, particularly in conflict-affected regions. These challenges hinder women's full participation in public and political life, leading to exclusion from decision-making processes, including peace and security discussions, as recognized by the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda.

Governments must recommit to closing gender gaps by implementing stronger legal frameworks, ensuring equal access to education and healthcare, and addressing cultural and institutional barriers that prevent women from achieving their full potential. National and regional assessments of the Beijing Platform for Action should incorporate these critical issues, especially in relation to women's participation in sustainable development and crisis recovery efforts.

Economic Empowerment of Women: Enhancing Economic Independence

The economic empowerment of women is fundamental to achieving gender equality. Despite the significant strides made in some regions, women's labor force participation remains limited due to structural inequalities, including unequal pay, lack of access to credit, and barriers to entrepreneurship. In many cases, women are concentrated in informal and low-wage sectors, which heightens their vulnerability to economic shocks, such as those caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

To address these challenges, we urge Member States to prioritize policy interventions that promote women's financial independence. These include reforming labor laws to ensure equal pay, expanding access to credit and financial services, and providing targeted support to women entrepreneurs. Furthermore, the implementation of social protection floors, particularly in conflict and post-conflict settings, is critical to shielding women from poverty and economic insecurity.

Addressing Violence Against Women and Girls

Gender-based violence (GBV) remains one of the most pervasive human rights violations globally, and its prevalence continues to rise in the wake of crises such as armed conflict, climate change, and pandemics. The Beijing Declaration emphasizes the need for concerted action to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls. However, entrenched social norms, inadequate legal protections, and weak enforcement mechanisms have hindered the effective prevention of GBV.

We call on Member States to strengthen legal and policy frameworks aimed at preventing GBV, prosecuting perpetrators, and protecting survivors. Comprehensive strategies must include the provision of survivor-centered services such as shelters, psychosocial support, and access to justice. Furthermore, addressing the root causes of GBV requires engaging men and boys in efforts to challenge harmful gender norms and practices.

Women in Leadership and Decision-Making

While progress has been made in increasing women's representation in leadership roles, women remain underrepresented in political, economic, and social decision-making spaces. The Beijing Platform for Action underscores the importance of women's participation at all levels of leadership. However, despite the global recognition of this need, barriers such as discriminatory laws, gender stereotypes, and political violence continue to impede women's access to leadership positions.

We recommend that Member States implement policies that promote women's full and equal participation in leadership roles, including through gender quotas, capacity-building programs, and initiatives to combat gender-based political violence. Additionally, institutions must promote inclusive governance practices that encourage the active involvement of women in policy-making, particularly in areas such as peacebuilding, climate action, and economic governance.

The Role of Technology in Advancing Gender Equality

Digital technologies have the potential to transform the lives of women and girls by improving access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities. However, the digital gender divide remains a significant barrier, with women and girls in many parts of the world having limited access to digital tools and the internet. This divide exacerbates existing inequalities and leaves women behind in an increasingly digital world.

To address this, Member States must prioritize investments in digital literacy and infrastructure to ensure that women and girls can fully participate in the digital economy. This includes closing the gap in internet access, particularly in rural and marginalized communities, and developing programs that empower women to use technology for entrepreneurship, education, and social advocacy. The Beijing Platform for Action provides a valuable framework for integrating gender equality into the digital transformation process.

Climate Change and Environmental Sustainability

Women and girls are disproportionately affected by the impacts of climate change, particularly in developing countries where they often rely on natural resources for their livelihoods. Despite their vulnerability, women play a crucial role in climate adaptation and mitigation efforts. The Beijing Declaration recognizes the importance of integrating a gender perspective into environmental policies and programs.

We call on governments to ensure that climate change policies are gender-responsive and that women are included in decision-making processes related to environmental sustainability. This includes promoting women's leadership in climate action, supporting women-led conservation initiatives, and ensuring that women have access to resources such as land, water, and clean energy.

Supporting Women and Girls in Conflict and Post-Conflict Settings

Conflict disproportionately affects women and girls, who are often targeted by sexual violence, forced displacement, and economic marginalization. The Beijing Platform for Action and the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda call for the protection of women's rights and the inclusion of women in peacebuilding processes. However, the implementation of these commitments has been slow, and women continue to be underrepresented in peace negotiations and post-conflict recovery efforts.

We urge Member States to take concrete actions to ensure that women are meaningfully involved in peacebuilding and reconstruction processes. This includes ensuring that peace agreements address the specific needs of women and girls, promoting women's leadership in post-conflict governance, and providing targeted support to women who have experienced conflict-related violence.

Strengthening Global Partnerships for Gender Equality

The successful implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action requires strong partnerships between governments, civil society, the private sector, and international organizations. Collaboration at the global, regional, and national levels is essential for addressing the complex challenges facing women and girls. In this regard, we emphasize the importance of multi-stakeholder partnerships in advancing gender equality and women's empowerment.

We call on Member States to engage with civil society organizations, including NGOs, in the design, implementation, and monitoring of gender equality policies. Additionally, the private sector has a crucial role to play in promoting women's economic empowerment through initiatives such as corporate social responsibility programs, gender-sensitive workplace policies, and investments in women-led businesses.

Advancing Women's Rights through International Norms and Standards

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action remains a critical framework for advancing women's rights globally. However, its full implementation requires the alignment of national laws and policies with international norms and standards. This includes the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda.

We urge Member States to harmonize their national legal frameworks with international human rights instruments and to report regularly on progress made in implementing gender equality commitments. Additionally, stronger accountability mechanisms are needed to ensure that governments are held accountable for their commitments to women's rights and gender equality.

Conclusion

As we approach the 30th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, it is critical that Member States renew their commitments to gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. The challenges highlighted in this statement – persistent gender gaps, economic inequalities, gender-based violence, underrepresentation in leadership, the digital divide, climate change, conflict-related vulnerabilities, and the need for stronger partnerships – must be addressed with urgency. By taking bold and transformative actions, we can ensure that the vision of the Beijing Platform is realized and that no woman or girl is left behind.

This statement is submitted in the spirit of collaboration and partnership, and we stand ready to support Member States in their efforts to achieve gender equality and empower women and girls worldwide.