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**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women
and to the special session of the General Assembly
entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development
and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of
strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern
and further actions and initiatives**

Statement submitted by Comité de América Latina y el Caribe para la Defensa de los Derechos de la Mujer, Centro de la Mujer Peruana Flora Tristán and Centro de Investigación para la Acción Femenina, 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.



Statement

Statement on promoting a human rights-based development strategy to address inequality and its effects on the lives of women and girls in Latin America and the Caribbean

The Comité de América Latina y el Caribe para la Defensa de los Derechos de la Mujer, the Centro de la Mujer Peruana Flora Tristán and the Centro de Investigación para la Acción Femenina are pleased that the States parties, at the fifty-eighth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, are addressing and considering the challenges faced and progress made in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls.

Only a year and half away from the evaluation of the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals, most of the countries in our region are very far from achieving them. It is a matter of concern that Latin America and the Caribbean represent one of the most unequal regions in the world. Although the Human Development Index shows that inequality of income has been reduced since 2000, its distribution is still biased in favour of men. The female poverty index shows that more women in the region are living in poor households (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, 2013).

Hunger and poverty cannot be eradicated without effecting a profound change in the economic model, which creates an unequal distribution of wealth and reflects economic liberalism, being marked by consumerism and the commercialization of nature and life in general. There is a need to rethink the development model, basing it instead on human rights and the mainstreaming of a gender perspective. Gender inequality is an impediment to ensuring progress towards the Millennium Development Goals and broader agendas for development, social justice and environmental sustainability. Much remains to be done to implement the resolutions of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, the Beijing Platform for Action and the Durban Platform, together with the International Labour Organization conventions, among others.

Although the world maternal mortality rate has declined by 47 per cent in the past 20 years (Millennium Development Goals, 2013), only half of the pregnant women in developing regions are receiving the recommended prenatal care, irrespective of the quality. In Latin America, the situation is worse for adolescents and women in rural areas because it is difficult for them to gain access to care. One hidden public health problem in our region is maternal death from abortions, which is as high as 13 per cent because of unsafe abortions, and more than a million women and girls are hospitalized each year as a result of complications from abortions (IPAS, 2009), representing a further violation of women's human rights.

It is urgent for States whose laws absolutely prohibit abortion (Chile, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Haiti, Honduras, Nicaragua and Surinam), as well as countries that maintain some form of prohibition, to revise these laws without delay in order to comply with the ratified international human rights treaties and conventions, and to recognize the sexual and reproductive rights, autonomy and freedom of women. Moreover, States where abortion is permitted for certain reasons (Argentina, Brazil, Colombia and Peru, as well as Mexico (Mexico City)), should ensure that this right is enforced in a timely and appropriate manner.

It is unacceptable that 123 million young people in the world (ages 15 to 24), 61 per cent of whom are female, are unable to read and write. Inequality of access to education for women persists because their inclusion has not been accompanied by changes in the core patriarchal system and its hierarchical structure. The illiteracy rates among indigenous women aged 15 years and older are nearly four times higher than those of non-indigenous women, and are higher than those of men. In both urban and rural areas, women receive fewer years of education on average. This social gap makes it more difficult for indigenous women to enter the labour market (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, 2013).

Although women have been gaining ground in relation to access to the labour market, and Latin America and the Caribbean have nearly reached gender parity in terms of the number of men and women who have paying jobs (Millennium Development Goals, 2013), this progress has not occurred evenly or in all areas of work. The wage gap has also been narrowing in recent years, but at a slow rate. Men earn 17 per cent more than women of the same age and educational level, with a sharper disparity for indigenous workers and those of African descent, who earn 28 per cent less. The economic crisis has had a differentiated effect, with women being more seriously affected by job instability and losses, while also having to bear the unremunerated burden of caring for children, older persons and the sick and thus being forced to work a double or triple day. These gaps are even further accentuated in the case of migrant women, who have no social safety net.

Despite the advances made in legislation and public policy, certain practices, social attitudes, socio-cultural patterns and gender roles persist and are used to justify violence against women and girls. The social, political and economic context of structural violence in the region has a direct, differentiated impact on the increase of violence against women. In 15 countries of the region, nearly 50 per cent of women have been victims of at least one type of sexual violence in their lives, and nearly 70 per cent of all physical abuse is committed by their own spouses or partners. Central America has one of the highest rates of murder of women (femicide or femicide) in the world: two of every three murdered women were killed simply because they were women (World Bank, 2012). Another disturbing aspect, which is often ignored by States, is the highly precarious situation of women in prison, who face various forms of violence and are denied their rights.

The average proportion of women parliamentarians in the world is barely 20.4 per cent, and in Latin America it amounts to only 24.5 per cent; women's participation at the local level is equally low (Millennium Development Goals, 2013).

In particular, we urge member States to:

- Meet their obligations to respect, protect and promote human rights, committing themselves to the principles of progressive realization, use of maximum available resources, non-regression, minimum essential levels/minimum core obligations, non-discrimination and equality;
- Prevent setbacks in the laws favouring the recognition of women's rights and promoting their empowerment; instead, encourage further progress to be made in coordination with civil society organizations and networks;
- Guarantee free, inclusive, intercultural, secular, de-patriarchalized, and high-quality public education to bring about a non-sexist and non-discriminatory

education system; promote comprehensive sexual education, free from religious prejudices that bind and constrain the bodies and autonomy of women.

- Comply, without delay, with the provisions of the Montevideo Consensus on Population and Development, whereby the States of the region agree to prioritize the prevention of teenage pregnancy and eliminate unsafe abortion;
- Comply with the obligation to establish effective policies to regulate financial institutions and markets; eliminate macroeconomic policies that exacerbate inequalities based on socio-economic conditions, gender, race, class or ethnic group; and prevent the regression of guaranteed economic and social rights, promote improvements in public policies and strengthen policies for development cooperation;
- Transform the economic system and development model into one that promotes real social and environmental justice, respectful of nature, in which women are empowered and recognized as important actors in development.
- Ensure the appropriate formulation and effective application of legislation guaranteeing women's right to a violence-free life and eliminating discriminatory attitudes, in accordance with General Recommendation 19 on violence against women and the Convention of Belém do Pará.
- Guarantee access to justice and compensation, legal advisory assistance, measures to raise awareness among police and justice officials, teachers, health care personnel and communications media, allocating the necessary resources.
- Prioritize the effort to combat violence against women and girls in State policies, highlighting its various forms of expression and taking into account its relationship to the feminization of poverty, migration and the increase of HIV infection in this population.
- Ensure compliance with international standards and prevailing norms for the protection of the human rights and personal dignity of women in prison.
- Ensure compliance with the effective implementation of a policy to achieve parity and eliminate gender inequality in political participation.

We call on the Commission on the Status of Women to encourage leadership and support States in complying with their human rights obligations. We reaffirm our commitment to work with the United Nations in building a world where the human rights of all men and women are fully realized.

All the organizations that support this statement have been recognized as bodies in consultative status with the Council.