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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”**

Statement submitted by Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University, 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

Contribution of Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University

Fifty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)

United Nations Headquarters, New York

“The community in which I grew up did not accept that women should perform any task outside the household. That was many years ago. Things have changed since. I, however, did not wait for the change: I ardently wished to work for humanity’s improvement, and that’s what I set out to do (...)

The world has never asked women to help to solve the problems. Instead, it has turned to great authorities, scholars and those in power. That has been a crucial error.”

Dadi Janki, Global Head of Brahma Kumaris, aged 99

In connection with the main focus of the fifty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) on the follow-up of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the post-2015 development agenda, this statement underscores the crucial need to work on women’s spiritual development and mental health, including such strategies as meditation, in order to achieve women’s empowerment and thereby the sustainability of changes towards gender equality and equity. It is necessary to overcome the challenges impeding women’s development and participation in solving the various problems currently facing the world. Accordingly, we agree with UN WOMEN regarding the inclusion of the promotion of gender equity as a specific goal in the post-2015 development agenda.

Twenty years have gone by since the Beijing Platform for Action was agreed upon. In that interval, significant progress was achieved in the areas of gender equality and equity policies, rules for the protection of women’s rights, women’s political participation and women’s economic development. Such progress, however, has not been uniform in all continents.

In Latin America, the number of women parliamentarians is on the increase, and in four countries the president is a woman. Although it has receded in several continents, the maternal mortality rate is still considerable in the countries of Africa and Southeast Asia.

Despite the progress noted, many challenges still need to be overcome for gender equality and equity to become tangible in all areas of life and development. According to the World Health Organization, approximately 35 per cent of women aged 15-69 in low- and medium-income countries have suffered some form of spousal abuse (WHO, 2013).

Group rapes of young and adolescent women in India and the use of sexual violence as a weapon in African and Middle Eastern countries continue to be serious problems with multiple negative effects on women’s personal development and mental health, the peoples’ economic development and the social fabric.

Access to credit and the means of production continues to be problematic for rural women because they do not own land and because of discriminatory cultural practices that obstruct their access to, inter alia, modern know-how and equipment.

Child-raising is incumbent on women, doubling their working hours and thereby affecting their well-being and health.

We therefore concur with UN Women that the post-2015 development agenda must encompass gender equity as a high-priority goal with a view to sustainable, comprehensive and equitable development.

In order to ensure the sustainability of changes towards the attainment of development objectives, women's personal and spiritual empowerment should be a key target of resources and organized efforts.

Power manifests itself in various interrelated forms. Studies conducted from a gender perspective have shown the effects of the use of the power of domination in patriarchal society. However, one of the themes that have been insufficiently explored in discussions on social development is inner power. Generally, the need to strengthen mental health has been veiled or downplayed.

Subjected to the power of patriarchal domination, women developed a tendency towards spiritual search, solidarity and non-violence. For instance, according to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), research has highlighted that rural women's empowerment can contribute to the well-being of the community as a whole. Thus, entrusting women with a greater share of resources is beneficial to boys' and girls' nutrition, health and education (FAO, 2011).

Such spiritual power is a question of values, virtues and an outlook conducive to personal and environmental changes that are more sustainable. All major global-scale changes and all changes in the life of individuals result from subtle changes in awareness.

A change in awareness entails a change in attitude and thereby influences one's world view and enables persons to undertake action never attempted before. It is such new action that creates a new world. Thus, the stages for all sustainable and genuine change are awareness, attitude, vision, action and the world. These stages form a "spiritual itinerary".

Spiritual or inner power improves mental health and thus builds capacities for decision-making, creativity and resilience. The mental health of the peoples of the world is increasingly worsening and mental disorders are becoming increasingly frequent in developing countries, as a result of persistent problems related to poverty, demographic transition, conflicts and social and gender violence, emergencies and natural disasters. It is estimated that 450 million persons in the world are currently affected by serious mental disorders (WHO, 2007).

Meditation is a method for connecting with the inner self, strengthening awareness of one's own identity, experiencing a being's values and original virtues, and thus improving emotional balance. This is linked with one's own dignity, reinforcing the experience affirmed in article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as follows: "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood". That is genuine empowerment.

Women's spiritual empowerment will improve the world. To quote Gandhi: "If you educate a man you educate an individual, but if you educate a woman you educate a nation". Dadi Janki and other women changed their vision of their own

life and decided to work to improve the state of the world, thereby inspiring hundreds of thousands of women to access their own internal resources and empower themselves. An empowered woman recognizes her intrinsic dignity, values her current potential, is free to choose and to decide, creates for herself spaces for comprehensive well-being, and is master of herself and happy. We believe that such a holistic and transforming approach can accelerate the change that we seek.
