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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 World Union of Catholic Women’s Organizations, 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

Women's empowerment and its link to sustainable development

Poverty and Environment

Goal 1 — End poverty in all its forms everywhere

We aspire to a development model that encourages solidarity, care for one another, combats exploitation, especially of those who live in poverty, reduces inequality, and is sustainable. Without sustainable development we will not reduce poverty. Poverty should not only be looked at in its material dimension but also in its social and spiritual ones.

We need to listen to the voice of the affected communities, when implementing the Sustainable Development Goals, and work towards making them self-sufficient and resilient as well as providing them with the means to do so.

We wish that the exposure of the poor to economic, social and environmental shocks, including human trafficking and dangerous forced migration, be reduced (1.5). Poverty induced by climate change shows, indeed, many forms: it has an impact on health, it induces internal and transnational migration, and it impacts the livelihoods of people, very often women due to their unequal status.

Goal 2 — End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture

We affirm the need to protect ancestral knowledge, which helps to cope with climate change and protect indigenous seeds (2.5).

Goal 6 — Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all

We affirm that access to sanitation should not only be adequate and equitable, but also safe.

We are aware of the need to protect and preserve the world's natural resources as they are a common good to all humanity; water, for example, should not be used as a diplomatic weapon.

Goal 12 — Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns

We need to change our lifestyle because it is not sustainable and use our power as consumers. Part of it is to reduce food waste. Food production is using a lot of natural resources; if we waste food, we waste natural resources (12.5).

Goal 13 — Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts

We hear the cry of the poor: fighting climate change is defending the poor.

We desire that the human life be valued in the climate change debate; human beings should not be deemed only as "carbon footprints".

Human Ecology and women's dignity

Goal 3 — Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

We wish to clarify that healthy life is to be understood regarding the health of the person as a whole — including the most vulnerable, the unborn, the sick, the disabled — along all stages of the life of the person, with all its dimensions (physical, psychological, spiritual, emotional).

Goal 5 — Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

We would like to suggest that empowerment of women and girls be understood as respect for the dignity of women, strengthening them, educating them, giving them a voice when they have none, helping them to develop abilities and assume responsibilities.

We think it is important to promote the formation of women to enable them to value their femininity, their access to education at all levels, because a well-prepared woman is less prone to manipulation.

We believe that maternity is key to understanding femininity, maternity not just as a biological concept but also spiritual.

We think it is key that the family be reaffirmed as the natural and fundamental cell of society as an ally against poverty.

We want to encourage States to consider fiscal policies, investment plans and employment opportunities with respect to their impact on the well-being of families.

We are wondering how women are empowered when we allow the exploitation of the wombs of poor women with maternal surrogacy and commercialization of the services of third party reproduction. This is a clear violation of human rights that should be addressed. Along those same lines, a woman's right cannot be promoted if she is even denied the right to be born, so gender-selective abortions should also be condemned.

We believe that working mothers should be protected; family policies should be implemented so that a family may be free to decide to grant care for their children. The social role of maternity should be clearly recognized together with a revalorization of the domestic care work.

We would like to see a clearer rejection of all sorts of exploitation of women including prostitution, pornography, human trafficking, and the use of women as objects in the media.

We would like to reinforce women's presence in all decision-making processes, in the family and in society.

We think it has to be clearly stated that forced abortion, forced sterilization and forced contraception are clear violations of the human rights of women.

We believe it is key that women are included in all efforts in society towards peace building and that women are included in peace negotiations.

Education and Work

Goal 4 — Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

We affirm that education is a human right.

Education “for all” also means quality education. Ensuring opportunities for all. By this we draw attention especially to the situation of children who are not officially registered, migrants or refugees who often don’t have access to education.

We affirm that any education has to focus on relations, because development is the fruit of good relations.

We affirm that educating youth in the field of Economy, Ethics and Finance is paramount to change the models of development.

We affirm that vocational education is not less important than other higher levels of education such as university.

We affirm that lifelong learning opportunities are necessary to avoid marginalising some groups (for example, people over 60 years old) from society, in particular in the field of new technologies.

We affirm that education is a right for all those who, for whatever reason have not had the opportunity to receive it, for example literacy programs should be available where and when needed.

We affirm the need to give special care to children (especially girls) who are prevented from attending school programs for fear of being abused by their teachers.

Goal 8 — Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all

We affirm that the struggle against corruption (at political, financial and administrative levels) requires our utmost attention to correct a bad use of resources.

We affirm our concern for the increase of unemployment worldwide and the poor working conditions to which thousands of workers are submitted; we reaffirm the need of decent work for all.

We affirm our concern for women who are deprived of the freedom of choice in selecting their work.

We affirm the need to be vigilant with regard to a development model that does not respect equitable growth for all and avoid any exploitative practices.

We affirm that there can’t be sustainable development if consumers are not aware of their moral obligation to consume goods in a sustainable way.

Peace and Development

Goal 16 — Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels

We believe that intercultural and interreligious dialogue, in particular the freedom of religion should be promoted, that institutions where people can meet and innovate respecting/regarding human rights for the common good should be created and that support to citizens and communities initiatives applying human rights through concrete actions should be given.

We acknowledge the great value of both maternity and spiritual maternity recognizing that women are major guardians and defenders of life –from conception to its natural end-, giving women means and empowering them to realize their functions with dignity far from physical and psychological violence. We affirm the urgent need to end forced abortion and female feticide (16.1).

We affirm the urgent need to end abuse, modern slavery, maternal surrogacy, exploitation, human trafficking and all forms of violence against women and torture of children (16.2).

We ask governments to be transparent in arm trades and request the United Nations to prohibit arm selling to countries in conflict. Banks should be obliged to give information relative to arm trades (16.4).

We ask that governments and organizations help those associations and social projects where women are protagonists and to help peace development in countries where conflicts and natural disasters exist (16.4).

We need to fight corruption: corruption steals from the poor (16.6).
