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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 Greek Orthodox Archdiocesan Council of North and South America and Salesian Missions, 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.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Introduction

As international faith-based organizations of the Christian tradition, and moreover as members of the global human community, we regard the full empowerment of women at every level of society as a necessary and central component of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. We commend the prioritization of women's empowerment and gender equality by Member States in the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals and Targets, and we support the continued strengthening of the world community's efforts to ensure the rights and empowerment of women through the forthcoming decisive indicators. These efforts must be rooted in the universal right of self-determination and an affirmation of equal human dignity through systemic shifts in cultural ideas as well as the implementation of enforceable legislation.

To foster the comprehensive, robust, and viable progress of all goals outlined in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, women's empowerment at every level, i.e., sociocultural participation, the right to decision making, and full participation in society through equitable self-determination, are the centrepiece of the language and content of the Commission's recommendations to Member States.

The disempowerment of women has deleterious consequences for the sociocultural and infrastructural development at all levels and in all sectors. Without the comprehensive and structural empowerment of women, all dimensions of communal living stagnate or regress. It influences, inter alia, multidimensional poverty as it relates to health, education, and standard of living; the creation and success of social protection floors; the family unit; equitable economic opportunity; and the common good of small communities and the global community as a whole.

We reaffirm our common interest in the empowerment of women and the importance of women's full and active participation in every level of society with the goal of sustainable and comprehensive development. All persons are entitled to live with dignity and the right of self-determination regardless of gender and/or sex. We underscore this inherent right as not only a philosophical and common good, but as a status of vital importance necessary to the realization of global sustainable development. We continue to insist that the pursuit of equality and recognition of this universal dignity must continue solely by peaceful means, while remembering and respecting the unique gifts and qualities of both women and men within various cultures, customs, and traditions.

Assessing the Need of Women's Empowerment

Investing in women on both the micro and macro levels leads to the substantial and long-term economic and structural growth of communities. These investments must be coupled with legislation and a cultural infrastructure that encourages the right of self-determination, equal opportunity, and equitable access to resources for women and girls.

The data related to women's empowerment and its link to sustainability have been noted:

- The World Bank notes in most countries women earn on average only 60 to 75 per cent of men's wages for comparable work. According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, an increase in women's labour force participation, or a reduction in the gap between male and female labour force participation, results in faster and more sustainable economic growth.
- An investment in the education of women and girls is directly proportional to greater economic growth. According to the United States Agency for International Development, when 10 per cent more girls go to school, a country's GDP increases an average of 3 per cent.
- According to the World Bank's 2012 World Development Report: Gender Equality and Development, closing gender gaps matters for development and policymaking. Greater gender equality can enhance economic productivity, improve development outcomes for the next generation, and make institutions and policies more representative.
- United Nations data indicates that women in emerging economies are likely to invest 90 per cent of the money they make back into their local communities, investing in vital services including, inter alia, children's education, health, and nutrition. By comparison, research shows that men invest only 30 to 40 per cent in the same way.
- In a 2014 report on women in leadership, McKinsey & Company found that private business greatly benefits from increasing leadership opportunities for women, as female management greatly increases organizational effectiveness.
- The Clinton Global Initiative emphasizes that women who control their own income tend to have fewer children, and fertility rates have been found to be inversely related to national income growth. Societies where girls and young women delay marriage and bearing children have enhanced opportunities for increasing per capita income and creating more rapid economic growth.
- The Executive Director of UN-Women reports that in conflict-affected countries, women's share of parliamentary seats is 4 per cent below the global average.
- A woman dies from complications in childbirth every minute. According to UNICEF, motherless children are up to 10 times more likely to die within 2 years of their mother's death. Most of these complications are preventable with access to the proper preventative, prenatal, and maternal care.
- Women who have access to and use maternal health services are more likely to use other healthcare services and seek healthcare for their children.

UN-Women reminds us that women and girls are more than half the world's population. They are often more profoundly impacted by poverty, climate change, food insecurity, lack of healthcare, and global economic crises than men and boys.

As communities of faith, we condemn any and all forms of discrimination or inequality that lead to the disproportionate exclusion of women from full participation at all levels and sectors in society. Without combating the structural, cultural, and historical silencing of women and their multidimensional second class citizenship, any investment of resources cannot reach its full potential. Women must be regarded with full and equal dignity and personhood in legislative and cultural

language, and held in the highest esteem for their unique contributions to our families, legislative bodies, workplaces, and global community as a whole.

Research shows that investing time and resources in women and girls and facilitating environments that allow them to empower themselves leads to stronger, more sustainable, safer, and healthier communities. Those who retain social, political, or cultural power have a responsibility to yield such control to the individual so that she may exercise her right to self-determination. Our responsibility as a global community to empower women with this right is not only of paramount moral and ethical importance, it is necessary for the sustainable growth of our communities and of our world.

Recommendations

Comprehensive sustainable development cannot be realized without empowering women at every level of society — and in every sector — through both cultural understanding and legislative directives. Recognizing our common but differentiated responsibilities, we recommend that Member States and Civil Society partner to:

- Include language in legislative and reportive documents that indicate women and girls as an especially vulnerable and therefore protected class on issues of poverty, discrimination, gender-based violence, access to healthcare, education, food security, and climate change.
- Ensure the full and unobstructed participation of women in the political, economic, and public processes of their communities and nations.
- Enforce equal pay for equal work, as well as equitable access to labour force opportunities at all levels.
- Eliminate all forms of violence and intimidation against women and girls in society and in the home.
- Ensure access to ethical prenatal and maternal healthcare for women and girls.
- Ensure access to all other necessary medical services, understanding the unique healthcare needs of women and girls.
- Ensure access to safe, equitable, and comprehensive education for women and girls of any age.
- Improve public and private organizational support for single, widowed, young, or otherwise in-need mothers and families, including paid maternity leave and access to affordable childcare.
- Establish laws that grant and protect the land and business ownership of women.
- Address all forms of objectification and dehumanization of women in media, advertising, the home, and the workplace.
- Avoid soft law mechanisms and promote the adoption of legally binding instruments.