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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 International Women’s Health Coalition, 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

Realizing gender equality and women's and girls' human rights, including their sexual and reproductive rights, is key to achieving their empowerment. The 2030 Agenda recognizes that sustainable development will only be possible if all women and girls are empowered to have control over and make decisions about all aspects of their lives and barriers to their equality are eliminated. Upon the occasion of the 60th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women, the International Women's Health Coalition calls upon governments to fully implement their commitments to gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment in the 2030 Agenda and provide the full range of means of implementation to make them a reality.

The strength of the 2030 Agenda is its recognition that comprehensive, multisectoral approaches are needed to eliminate all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls and achieve gender equality. The Agenda commits to:

- End all forms of discrimination against women and girls and eliminate discriminatory laws, policies and practices (Targets 5.1 and 10.3)
- Eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls (Target 5.2)
- Recognize and value unpaid care work performed by women and provide public services and social protection to reduce their burden of work (Target 5.4)
- Ensure that all girls complete primary and secondary education, that women have equal access to tertiary and vocational education and eliminate gender disparities in education (Targets 4.1, 4.3 and 4.5)
- Ensure that all learners receive education on human rights and gender equality (4.7)
- Protect women's rights to economic resources, including ownership and control over land and other forms of property and inheritance (Targets 1.4)
- Ensure full and productive work for women and equal pay for work of equal value (target 8.5)
- Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making (Target 5.5)
- Ensure women's and girls' access to sanitation and hygiene (target 6.2)

Critically, it contains specific commitments to sexual and reproductive health and rights, recognizing that they are essential for gender equality and women's empowerment. These include targets to ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health services, information, and education and to incorporate reproductive health into national sustainable development strategies (target 3.7); reduce maternal mortality (target 3.1); end HIV/AIDS (target 3.3); protect reproductive rights (target 5.6); and eliminate harmful practices against women and girls, including child, early, and forced marriage and female genital mutilation (target 5.3).

As the only United Nations process dedicated exclusively to the realization of women's and girls' human rights, the Commission on the Status of Women has a critical role to play in ensuring that the commitments to gender equality and women's and girls' human rights and empowerment contained in the Sustainable Development Goals remain priorities.

While gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment are the focus of much attention, significant resource gaps remain. At all levels, institutions focused on women's rights are under-funded and lack the power necessary to be able to implement programs at scale. At the same time, women's and feminist organizations, which have been proven to be the drivers of change at the country level, are struggling to raise the money necessary to do their work.

Investments in sexual and reproductive health and rights are similarly lagging. According to the Guttmacher Institute, in order to fully meet women's and girls' sexual and reproductive health needs, governments need to double their current investments to \$39.2 billion annually, or \$25 for every woman of reproductive age. This would have major health benefits, reduce the number of unintended pregnancies, unsafe abortions and maternal deaths and injuries, and reduce the incidence of Sexually Transmitted Infections. It would also create the conditions necessary for women to exercise autonomy over their sexual and reproductive lives and participate on an equal basis in society, necessary to achieve both gender equality and sustainable development.

In addition to funding, countries must eliminate discriminatory and punitive laws and put in place positive measures to promote women's and girls' human rights and empowerment as recognized in target 5c. Discriminatory laws and policies, including those that restrict access to abortion services; sanction child marriages; or prohibit women from inheriting property or controlling economic resources, are major barriers to women's empowerment that must be addressed.

Finally, the 2030 Agenda falls short with regards to the structural and systemic changes, as well as the human rights-based approach necessary to truly achieve gender equality and women's empowerment. Systemic economic issues such as trade liberalization, globalization, privatization of public services, and increasing inequality between and within countries have a direct effect on women's empowerment and human rights. Despite an increased number of women in the workforce, women still earn significantly less than men, make up a majority of informal workers, and are responsible for significantly more unpaid domestic and care work than men. Recent austerity policies employed by both developed and developing countries alike shift the burden of caring for family members back onto women and girls, and have reduced funding for organizations that provide social services to women.

The 2030 Agenda could be truly transformative for women and girls if it is fully implemented. In order to do this, in the Agreed Conclusions, the Commission on the Status of Women should urge governments to:

- Fully implement the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly goal 5 and targets focused on gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment.
- Dedicate concrete resources to address gender equality at all levels and close the funding gap for women's institutions.

- Implement gender-responsive planning and budgeting at all levels, including in official development assistance, and monitor spending to ensure that resources are adequately meeting women's and girls' needs.
- Examine and address structural barriers that stand between women and full enjoyment of their economic rights, including unpaid work and parental leave.
- Strengthening the evidence-base for gender equality and empowerment of women and girls.
- Fully implement the gender equality means of implementation targets (5a, b and c) and ensure a gender-responsive approach to the realization of all other means of implementation commitments.
- Invest in greater capacity-building on issues surrounding gender, gender-responsive budgeting, and data collection so that gender is mainstreamed throughout national and local government policies and funding. Also invest in the capacity of women's organizations advocating for policy change with their national governments.
- Implement, resource, and enforce laws and policies that promote gender equality and protect the human rights of women and girls.
- Develop a robust set of gender indicators at all levels that ensure that the 2030 Agenda is fully implemented with a gender perspective.
- Ensure that data is, at a minimum, disaggregated by "income, gender, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts."
- Strengthen the follow up and review mechanisms at all levels to ensure full accountability. Ensure that these mechanisms are transparent and open to civil society, including women's and feminist groups.

The full realization of the sexual and reproductive health and rights of women and girls is crucial to the achievement of sustainable development. Governments must reaffirm their existing commitments to protect, promote and fulfil women's and girls' rights to have control over and decide freely and responsibly on all matters related to their sexuality and reproduction free from coercion, discrimination and violence. This requires strengthening their commitments to guarantee that all women and girls have access to the full range of quality comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services. The Commission on the Status of Women should also address gaps in the 2030 Agenda, in particular by reaffirming its existing commitments to provide comprehensive sexuality education that promotes gender equality and human rights, and respecting, protecting and fulfilling sexual rights. These commitments must be fully funded and prioritized in national budgets. Governments must also take steps to dismantle discriminatory laws and policies, including those targeting individuals of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities that stand as barriers to sexual and reproductive health services.

The Commission on the Status of Women must also urge governments to address the systemic issues that disadvantage women and girls, including the following steps:

- Ensure that trade agreements are subject to robust gender, human rights, and environmental safeguards
 - Examine structural barriers that stand between women and full enjoyment of their economic rights, including unpaid work and parental leave
 - Ensure corporate accountability in development, including by cracking down on corporate tax evasion and by ensuring that mechanisms are in place to oversee public-private partnerships and other private sector investment
 - Implement progressive taxation policies
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