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Statement submitted by Canadian Federation of University Women, Federación Mexicana de Universitarias, Graduate Women International (GWI), and Women Graduates – USA, Inc., 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

Women Graduates-USA is a member organisation based in the United States with a focus on national issues having international implications. Our main areas of programme and advocacy are Education, Violence Against Women with an emphasis on Human Trafficking in all its forms, Women's Global Health, equal and safe access to education for refugees especially women and girls and support for the UN 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals 3, 4, 5, 10 and 17.

Twenty-five years ago, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action recognized the importance of including women in all decision-making in public life. In 2000, the United Nations Security Council with its landmark Resolution 1325, finally acknowledged the horrendous violence women suffered during war and its aftermath and that post construction peace-building, when including women, was more likely to succeed and last longer than those accords negotiated exclusively by men. Since then, the United Nations continues to implore governments, political parties, trade unions and professional and other representative groups to include women in leadership positions to achieve equal representation. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, passed in 1979, provides the basis for universal law and legal remedies requiring governments to implement their legal obligations in this critical area of concern.

In spite of these global agreements, norms and standards for women's full participation in public life, governments led by men have not only failed to include, and all too often have intentionally excluded, women from most decision-making regarding the public good, issues that impact women's livelihood and personal and family lives. The age-old male dominated decision-making model in developing and developed countries has shown itself to favour corporate interests and to be disingenuous in its espoused advancement of ordinary citizens and the welfare of the planet. Our current global health crisis lays bare the staggering shortcomings of predominantly male decisions. Wanton short-sightedness and unpreparedness for the future presents a clear and present danger to the stewardship of the planet.

Research shows that women make decisions favouring the welfare of families, communities and countries and espouse the use of nonviolent strategies while men make decisions favouring wealth, power over others and competitive, exclusionary solutions. Countries led by women have been more successful in managing the COVID-19 crisis, with better health outcomes for their citizens than those led by men. Women, overall, repeatedly make better decisions that benefit their individual families, their communities at large and their countries. Women understand that answers lie in educating and informing families on the need to take personal and community responsibilities for the wellness of all. The fate of the world depends on women's deep-seated ability to empathize and to devise long-term sustainable solutions.

Sustainable Development Goal 3 is specifically devoted to "Ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all at all ages", and while the concept of "well-being" is embedded in all the sustainable development goals, the current global health pandemic has revealed socioeconomic disparities in health and provision of universal health care as a solution for sustainable health equity and the importance of the status of women in improving the social determinates of health. These inequalities have exacerbated the multiple challenges women and girls experience, giving rise to a shadow pandemic of increased gender-based violence, particularly domestic violence, as well as child abuse. Impacts experienced by women and girls are: sexual exploitation at work and in other arenas, human trafficking, overwhelming demands to provide and care for children along with a lack of child-care resources, lack of safe

havens, the inability to escape untenable shut-in situations, physical and mental insecurity, food and water deprivation, lack of healthcare including access to contraception, rabid prejudice and discrimination, abusive and inhuman treatment at country border crossings and lack of protection by governments.

The structures of families and society are at a breaking point because our institutions do not reflect the wellbeing of their members. Prevalence of violence against women has condemned families and communities to the perpetuation of violence, not just at home, but also extended into the streets, and is reflected in increased crime rates everywhere. We continue to allow children to learn that male violence is the voice that prevails, controlling through the threat of harm. Politicians are still excused for misogynist behaviours allowing others to follow their role model.

An intentional change clearly calls for an end to violence against women, the reform of harmful economic and social policies currently in force and the development of new policies that create gender, economic and social equality.

Women Graduates-USA emphatically stresses that we can no longer withstand decision-making biased against gender and race that results in harm to individuals and societies and appeals for economic, social and environmental justice for all peoples everywhere. In this defining moment, our world is at its tipping point with the fate of the planet and human civilization dependent on the intent, values, attitudes and beliefs of our global and national decision-makers.

Women's leadership is crucial to meet the goals and targets of the 2030 Development Agenda as the Sustainable Development Goals provide structural reforms to the current economic and social systems of all countries. It is imperative that women contribute their voices and perspectives towards decision-making at the highest levels nationally and globally and that they participate in the implementation of reforms and policies at all levels.

For some time, traditional macroeconomic models have not worked for the planet or its people. While economic integration, unfettered by global governance and national policies has increased the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for certain countries, it has not measurably improved the general health and wellbeing of the people of their respective countries.

Women Graduates-USA therefore calls upon the United Nations to summon its considerable influence with Member States to reaffirm and expand their commitments to the already agreed-upon global norms and programmes for women's leadership development and for the robust engagement of women in all spheres of public life.

At this dire time of widespread economic disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, Women Graduates-USA also recommends that the United Nations press Member States to invest in designing and developing women's leadership programmes, with the understanding these investments yield increasing returns for their countries. Among the returns is an easier passage through the Pandemic, resulting in healthier citizens and economies. At the same time, women's full participation in decision-making in public life and the creation of an "economy of well-being" that has been studied by economists around the world is a key factor in creating vibrant human development, sustainable societies and the renewal of our planet.

Women Graduates-USA calls upon women's organizations to provide empowerment and leadership training for women particularly in areas of fiscal and economic policy which put people and the planet front and centre.

Finally, Women Graduates-USA calls upon international, national and local foundations and every organization involved in grant-making to fund women's leadership programmes, recognizing that country governments will fund these initiatives as token attempts for parity rather than recognizing women's empowerment and meaningful participation in positions of power and decision-making as the key to the sustainability of our human existence and the viability of our planet.
