



## Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General  
21 November 2020

Original: English

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### Commission on the Status of Women

#### Sixty-fifth session

15–26 March 2021

**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 Les femmes, la force du changement, 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.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

At Les femmes, la force du changement (FFC), we recognize the critical importance of the full, active, and effective participation of women when making decisions regarding matters affecting their public life. In addition to this, we share the belief that eliminating violence against women is the first and most important step towards achieving gender equality and women empowerment. Ultimately, we believe that empowering women is vital in creating a safe, inclusive, and equal society.

Gender inequality is a pressing issue that must be addressed as soon as possible. While it is widely acknowledged that gender equality is a basic human right, countless women and girls are still largely marginalized and underrepresented in current society.

According to UN Women, although 143 out of 195 countries have already included gender equality between men and women in their constitutions, these laws still do not guarantee equality in practice. In fact, discrimination against women is still very prevalent, directly and indirectly. Sadly, this continues to go unnoticed, despite the fact that gender inequality is proven to hamper positive progress to any country's economic and political stature worldwide.

Historically, women and girls have always been subject to various forms of oppression. In the past, boys were sent to universities to learn business and trades while girls were sent to finishing schools to prepare for marriage. To this day, many cultures allow only the family's male children to study in formal schools. Female children are taught only basic things like reading, writing, and basic mathematics. Instead of finishing their schooling, they are expected to help around the house and learn how to become good wives to their future husbands.

In impoverished and struggling families, girls are also expected to give way for their siblings' education, especially their brothers. Sometimes, they are even forced to become child labourers in order to help their families survive. According to UNICEF, this is completely counterproductive to any country's interests. Investing in female education actually delays teenage pregnancies and early marriage by up to 64 per cent, reducing poverty risks. In addition to this, every 1 per cent increase in female education is a 0.3 per cent increase in a country's gross domestic product (GDP) and a 0.2 per cent increase in the annual GDP growth rate.

Even in countries where the gap between men and women is relatively smaller, discriminatory views and practices can still be observed. Full equality and equity for women and girls have yet to be established in all countries. Deeply-rooted social norms still differentiate women and girls from their peers and discredit them from having equal opportunities. In a world dominated by men, to be bested by a woman has always been seen as a sign of weakness and a symbol of inferiority. Dominating over women has been seen for so long as a mark of superiority, as well as a way to suppress women's abilities to advance in and contribute to society.

Women deserve equal remuneration and gender-neutral evaluation for their work as men. Women entrepreneurs are just as skilled as men entrepreneurs and should not be denied investment opportunities simply because they are not male. We condemn gender gaps in employment where women, limited by socio-economic constraints and pressured to conform to gender roles, tend to be unemployed or in vulnerable jobs, occupations perceived as unskilled, and of low value. We also challenge the preconception that segregates occupations into certain values. Gender-based stereotypes, such as limiting women's roles to only being mothers and caregivers, should be addressed.

In line with this, we recognize and seek to end the influence of culture and tradition in the form of customs, stereotypes, and norms that greatly hinder women from enjoying their fundamental rights and constrain them from advancing and reaching their full potentials legally, politically, and economically.

We disagree with the cultural and traditional expectation that the public sphere is a man's domain and that the domestic world is a women's realm. Fully-shared responsibilities on household care and child-rearing by both sexes is a must. It is crucial for all women to have access to social services and measures such as childcare facilities, supported by family laws, to remove the connections that discriminate against them based on their reproductive roles and allow them to combine responsibilities in the family with their work and public lives.

We promote work-family balance in the workplace, believing that both women and men should have access to adequate basic social protection measures such as maternity protection and paid parental leave. We share the opinion that a change in the traditional roles of both men and women in society and the family is vital in achieving equality between men and women.

Additionally, the persistent widespread violence against women is a glaring indication of a structural problem in society. In 1993, the UN General Assembly proclaimed the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women. Two years later, in 1995, this was followed by the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action. Finally, in 2011, the Council of Europe came out with the Istanbul Convention, also known as the Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence.

Despite these efforts, however, sexual harassment, rape, forced marriages, genital mutilation, domestic violence, and other crimes committed against women are still rampant across the globe. The gaps in the implementation of laws and the lack of access to essential services continue to leave millions of girls and women defenceless against gender-based violence.

The number of women and girls that have fallen victim despite laws in place is certainly sobering. Currently, one-third of women still experience physical or sexual violence, mostly by an intimate partner. More than 700 million living women have been forced into child marriage, roughly 133 million have been forced to undergo genital mutilation in 29 countries, and over 120 million have been forced into sexual activities at some point in their lives. Violence against women is so common that it is deemed a global pandemic by the UN, along with all the forms this violence manifests in all the spaces they can occur in.

We push for the creation of a safe society where women and girls are not afraid of getting harassed, abused, married off, or abducted. Violence against women is a serious violation of human rights and a grave obstruction to women's progress in life. It impedes their health, especially their mental and reproductive health, their prospects for quality education and productive work, and their confidence and capability to participate fully in society.

We strive to end the public mechanism that denies women of their basic human rights. Our aim is for an inclusive society that fosters their true potentials and encourages them to pursue their goals and dreams. Preventing and combating violence against women will enable their confidence and provide them with opportunities to explore within their bounds of comforting their sexuality and skills and talents. Equal opportunities for all sexes in health, education, work, and non-discriminatory norms and practices in culture and tradition will steer the society towards a gender-equal structure.

In summary, we firmly believe that an embracing, encompassing society that can inspire and allow girls and women to take charge of their own voices and roles can expedite greater social, political, educational, legal, and civil progress across nations.

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