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Statement submitted by Presbyterian Church (USA) and Presbyterian Women in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), 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

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) (“PC(USA)”) and Presbyterian Women in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Inc. (“PW, Inc.”) welcome the opportunity to address the 65th Commission on the Status of Women on women’s full and effective participation and decision-making in public life, elimination of violence, and the link to sustainable development. PC(USA), in covenant with PW, Inc., has worked for gender equality and equity motivated by our core belief that every person is created in the image of God deserving of dignity and equal treatment.

Women’s full and effective participation and decision-making in public life

PC(USA) and PW, Inc., have worked to create equal access, promoting participation in power structures, cooperative decision-making and leadership opportunities; encourage and strengthen cultural diversity and work for the full participation of women of color in leadership; speak out against and eliminate barriers created by racism, sexism, and classism; recognize, value, and respond to the insights of those without power; and engage in ministries of justice in economics, education, employment, and quality of life for women both in the church and in the world.

PC(USA) has elected series of women leaders to the highest elected office in the church: Co-Moderators of the General Assembly of 2016-2018, 2018-2020, and 2020-2022. Women have been hired as the president and executive director of the Presbyterian Mission Agency (PMA) and the PC(USA) A Corporation. In 2018, PMA hired the first woman of color as the president and executive director.

However, as we continue to strive for gender equity in leadership, we recognize the need to do more. While PC(USA) has ordained women clergy since 1956, and more Presbyterian women than men were ordained from 2007–2016, there is a distinct gender disparity in sphere of power and financial benefits. While women outnumber men ordained 1,597 to 1,503, men obtained greater financial benefits at 77 per cent to 62 per cent. The 2016 report, *Gender and Leadership in the PC(USA)*, revealed that more than 8 out of 10 ministers have experienced discrimination, harassment, and/or prejudicial comments due to their gender, and 4 out of 10 feel that they have experienced gender bias in hiring, promotion or selection for an official position within the PC(USA).

The importance of education is a fundamental affirmation of the PC(USA) and PW, Inc. in achieving gender equality. PC(USA) and PW, Inc. have been working with partners around the world to improve the quality of education for one million children by 2020 through the “Educate a Child, Change the World” Initiative by strengthening communities’ capacity to provide quality education; elevating the quantity and quality of early childhood programs offered by and in PC(USA) churches; training teachers and helping develop curricula; providing support to build or refurbish school buildings; initiating enrichment opportunities for children in cooperation with local schools; engaging and training leaders as advocates for children’s education; and participating in public policy debates around educational issues. PW, Inc. organizes Together in Action Days each May focused on improving children’s literacy. PW, Inc. participants are often the impetus for children’s literacy in the local church. It created numerous resources for reading with children, tutoring, strengthening community initiatives for literacy and advocating for schools and children.

To foster women leadership, PC(USA) created the Katie Cannon scholarship program in 2019 that supports Presbyterian women of color, clergywomen and college women, as well as other women of color, with opportunities for leadership and

spiritual development. PW, Inc. has Leadership Development Grants for Presbyterian women, as well as a grant fund for women seminarians of color.

Elimination of violence

PW, Inc. and PC(USA) affirm the treatment of all people as image-bearers of the Creator and to the respect of all of humankind as beings worthy of basic respect and humane treatment. Both affirm that violence is contrary to God's intentions for the world. As emerging data shows increased violence against women and girls during the COVID-19 pandemic, more needs to be done to address this issue.

PC(USA) and PW, Inc. partner with Presbyterians Against Domestic Violence Network (PADVN) that provides advocacy and resources for the prevention of and healing from societal and domestic violence; Courageous Conversations in October (Domestic Violence Awareness Month); participate in the UN's UNiTE to End Violence Against Women campaign; encourage ratification of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Violence Against Women (CEDAW); advocate at the Commission on the Status of Women; observe International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women on November 25 each year and 16 Days of Activism against Gender Violence beginning each November 25, and urge all to observe Orange Day on the 25th of every month by wearing orange to raise awareness of the global movement to end violence against women, particularly marginalized women who identify as lesbian, bisexual, transgender or intersex.

PW, Inc. and PC(USA) encourage participation in "Thursdays in Black," an initiative of the World Council of Churches seeking a world without rape and violence, by wearing black on Thursdays in solidarity, in protest, in mourning, and for awareness and hope. PW, Inc. supports local shelters and recovery programs for survivors of violence and trafficking. PC(USA) and PW, Inc. affirm that human beings are not for sale. Beginning in the 1970s, PW, Inc. and PC(USA) focused on the sexual exploitation of women. PC(USA) launched the Song of Songs Campaign to eliminate trafficking in women and assist victims of violence due to prostitution and trafficking. PW, Inc. partnered with ECPAT International in 1996 after a Global Exchange program to Southeast Asia that was focused on human trafficking. PW, Inc. takes part, in Together in Action to End Human Trafficking and Raising Awareness of and Ending Human Trafficking campaign each January.

Women's empowerment and link to sustainable development

PW, Inc. and PC(USA) recognize the deeper structural injustices that plague society in the forms of racial and economic discrimination that further heighten gender-based inequality. The denomination is addressing these injustices by inviting congregations to become a "Matthew 25" church that works toward dismantling structural racism and systemic poverty in our society.

PC(USA) has developed a resource on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development for churches and individuals to engage with the SDGs. In May 2019, PC(USA) with the full support of PW, Inc., reaffirmed its position on safe, legal abortion rights, thereby meeting one of the targets of Goal 5 ensuring universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights.

PW, Inc. takes part in Together in Action for Women's Empowerment each March and share their #MeToo and #ChurchToo stories. PW, Inc. encourages its constituents to engage in the triennial Initiative on Eco-justice, Substance Use

Disorder; Say Their Names: Reaffirming Presbyterian Women's Stance Against Racism, and the Poor People's Campaign.

PC(USA) and PW, Inc. recommend governments, civil society and the private sector make financial and political commitments to:

Remove barriers to women's educational opportunities and promote an equitable sharing of authority and responsibilities in family life, work, and society, as well as equal access to economic and political power;

Increase women and girls' access to education, especially for women and girls living in minority communities and rural areas, so that women and girls may contribute their full potential and skills in their communities, have increased confidence, and be assisted to better challenge issues arising from contact with male dominated enterprises;

Provide equal protection and access to government and decision-making bodies for all races and genders;

Work toward full access to sexual and reproductive healthcare;

Oppose all forms of gender-based stereotyping, discrimination, oppression and violence; and provide protections for transgender women and students against violence and bullying;

Provide legal protections for all persons who experience sexual and relationship abuse;

Fully implement the Beijing Platform for Action and other relevant international agreements such as The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, to ensure discrimination and gender biases are eliminated in local and national laws, policies and customs.

As we celebrate the 75th anniversary of the United Nations and the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration on women's rights, we remind the Commission of the important role that faith-based organizations have played in the advancement of women and will continue to work towards a just and sustainable future, and for the full flourishing of all God's people.
