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Statement submitted by Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America, 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

The Episcopal Church is a Christian denomination of two million members in 17 nations in North America, Latin America & the Caribbean, Europe and Asia & the Pacific. Known at the United Nations as the “Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America”, The Episcopal Church is a member province of the Anglican Communion.

As Christians, we believe that God created all humans equally in God’s image and worthy of dignity, love, liberty, and life-giving relationships with God, each other and creation. Our scriptures, Jesus’ way of love, and our baptismal covenant call us to love God and each other as ourselves and to seek and serve Christ in all persons. Our Christian hope includes transforming unjust systems of oppression, challenging violence, and pursuing peace and reconciliation. Responding to God’s abundant grace and love, we affirm the call to empower women and girls, celebrate their diversity, honor their forerunners, and welcome next generations.

Our Christian values are the reason The Episcopal Church has affirmed United Nations international conventions, agreements, and declarations calling for just and equal treatment of women and girls. Further, Episcopalians support women and girls through their mission, programs, legislation, policies and advocacy by congregations, dioceses, schools, seminaries, agencies and networks.

The Episcopal Church celebrates recent progress for and by women and girls, but laments that no country has achieved gender equality, progress is slow and structural inequities persist. We are alarmed by COVID-19’s disproportionate impact on women in health, caretaking, unemployment, poverty and violence against women – deemed a “shadow pandemic” – and the risks of long-term regression. We highlight these urgent priorities:

Prioritize marginalized women and girls in planning, resource allocation and programs

Episcopalians embraced the call to “leave no one behind” and “reach the furthest behind first” when The Episcopal Church affirmed Agenda 2030 in 2016. As Christ followers, our pre-existing call to uplift the marginalized is ancient, modern, and urgent. We declare unacceptable the disproportionate inequalities suffered daily by women of color; women of African descent; indigenous women; women with disabilities; women experiencing discrimination for their ethnicity, race, caste, descent, language, religion, sexual orientation or gender identity/expression; migrants, refugees, internally displaced, undocumented or stateless women; enslaved, trafficked or incarcerated women; rural women; women experiencing poverty; women lacking digital access; unemployed women; women whose work is considered immoral, illegal or unacceptable; older and ageing women; widows; and women heads of households. Their human rights and access to goods, services and opportunities often trail broader social goals, resource allocation, and programming. States regularly fail to consult them on issues and programs affecting them directly. Consequently, they are perpetually disadvantaged, marginalized, discriminated against, displaced, neglected, and excluded, increasing their susceptibility to poverty and abuse. Intersectionalities of race, class, ethnicity, and gender exacerbate these challenges. When human-made social constructs create systemic barriers to women and girls reaching their potential, all of society loses. Reaching the furthest behind first means prioritizing resources, services, social protections, infrastructure, networks and communications for their inclusion.

Increase women’s access to power and decision-making positions

Despite improvements in education, health care and self-representation, women still experience barriers to participation, advancement, leadership, governance and decision-making in public and private sectors. Longstanding cultural, religious, and societal beliefs, norms and practices keep women in traditional domestic and caretaking roles. Women’s views and ideas are often overlooked, dismissed or disrespected. Socio-economic conditions may preclude participation in public life and the workforce without sufficient resources, public services and social protections, such as higher education, health care including their sexual and reproductive health and rights, safe and affordable child care and digital access. Women are more likely to experience income precarity and income inequality, with women paid 16 per cent less than men. Sex discrimination in hiring, retention and promotion persists and women workers experience unacceptable behaviors and practices that may result in physical, psychological, sexual or economic harm, including gender-based violence and harassment. Patriarchal systems hamper women’s autonomy around land tenure, property and business ownership rights, commercial dealings, and contracts.

Politically, women’s rights to vote and citizenship have improved, but political representation remains unequal: in 2020, 1 in 4 national parliament seats are held by women. Women experience difficulties in finding funding and time to run for office. Patriarchy and sexist attitudes may prevent women representatives from being taken seriously, or result in harassment, intimidation, smear campaigns or even violence.

Girls and young women face similar obstacles. Too often their needs and concerns are forgotten or under-represented and they face age-based discrimination, marginalization and exclusion from decision-making hindering their fuller participation and leadership opportunities, access to role models, mentoring and intergenerational dialogue. We commend UN Women for addressing these gaps through the Generation Equality Forum.

Together, these factors inhibit women’s and girls’ participation, advancement, leadership, promotion, ownership and representation. When women are underrepresented, so are their interests. All of society loses the richness of their perspectives, contributions and accomplishments.

Promote gender equality education and eradicate violence against women and girls

Violence against women remains tragically common and domestic violence has increased with COVID-19. We decry the pervasive “shadow pandemic” of gender discrimination and violence, including sexual exploitation and sexual violence; intimate partner violence; physical assault; rape; psychological, physical, and sexual abuse; harassment, bullying, cyber-bullying, and online victimization; cultural stereotyping, objectification, and trivialization; human trafficking; and sexual violence as a tactic of war. Despite progress through legal frameworks and awareness-raising campaigns, our Church’s 2015 statement that it “deeply regret[ted] the lack of progress in stemming the global pandemic of violence against women” stands relevant. We must “speak out...to transform the unjust silence of society in the face of this widespread practice of violence”.

Violence against women is a form of gender discrimination rooted in law, harmful cultural traditions, religious beliefs and other belief systems. Consequentially, the full and sacred dignity of women and girls is diminished. Gender equality will be attainable once all of society understand its benefits. This requires culturally contextualized gender-equality education, including for men and boys, and transforming root causes. In 2015, our Church recommended “giving priority to the

achievement of gender equality and empowerment of all women, including transgender individuals”.

We urge member states, United Nations entities, and civil society to:

- prioritize marginalized women and girls by bringing them to center of consultations, policy design and decision-making;
- promote education and awareness campaigns affirming their individual and collective human rights;
- implement preferential financing, resource allocation, and programming measures to close inequality gaps;
- extend accessibility to contextually appropriate resource, education, technology, services and infrastructure;
- include gender-specific indicators in all statistical reporting and increase the evidence database;
- institute gender mainstreaming and gender-responsive budgeting across all policies and programs;
- extend access to public services and social protections, including full-term girls’ education, universal health care, including maternal and infant health, sexual and reproductive health, equal access to health care regardless of gender, paid family leave, affordable and safe childcare, viable social security systems and sustainable infrastructure;
- ensure a living wage for all and promote equal pay for equal work;
- align laws and policies to facilitate women’s ownership of land, property, and businesses;
- recognize women as contractual parties and participants in financial and commercial transactions;
- increase representation by women at all levels and in all sectors, using temporary special measures, quotas, direct appointments, and other means to achieve equality in advancement, appointments, and promotions;
- support women’s professional advancement and leadership development through education, training and supporting women-led and women’s organizations and trade unions;
- support youth participation by integrating them into policy design and decision-making, leadership development, training, mentoring and intergenerational dialogue;
- promote gender equality education for all, including men and boys;
- continue multi-stakeholder collaborations and grassroots campaigns to end gender violence;
- strengthen legal and judicial protections, including law enforcement, for all women and girls, especially survivors of violence;
- universally ratify and implement international frameworks including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, Security Council Resolution 1325, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and Agenda 2030.

Twenty-five years after Beijing, we must accelerate women's and girls' access to power and decision-making, prioritizing marginalized women and girls. The Episcopal Church calls upon member states, the United Nations, civil society and all people to uphold the values, principles, legislation and implementation of programs for gender equality, gender justice and human rights.
