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Statement submitted by United Cities and Local Governments, 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

We, mayors, women and men, local and regional elected representatives and our representative associations and networks:

RECALL the 1998 International Union of Local Authorities (IULA) Worldwide Declaration on Women in Local Governments; the 2013 Paris Local and Regional Governments' Global Agenda for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life; the 2006 European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life; as well as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) recommendations, particularly number 35 and the need to tackle all types of violence against women and girls, including at the local level;

REMIND the continued relevance of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, in particular in times of crises and emergencies, to face backlashes against the efforts towards gender equality – especially Article 36 on the role of international organizations, such as the World Organization UCLG, in implementing the UN Platform for Action;

STRESS our commitment to the campaign “Generation Equality: Realizing women’s rights for an equal future” to accelerate efforts towards the intergenerational empowerment of girls and women. In line with the campaign, local and regional governments play a key role in the fight for equal pay, for equal sharing of unpaid care and domestic work, for ending sexual harassment and all forms of violence against women and girls, including the commitment to guarantee sexual and reproductive rights, the right to sexual autonomy of women and for equal participation in politics and decision-making in all areas of life;

HIGHLIGHT the potential of decentralised for accelerating progress towards gender equality through peer-learning, capacity building, and the exchange of good practice. Exchanges between local governments from all sizes, especially through the ecosystem of networks and associations, fosters a bottom-up approach by stakeholders who are familiar with the specific needs of their population from a gender perspective;

SUBSCRIBE to the discussions and papers of the Expert Group Meeting (EGM) to the CSW65, which highlighted the trend of stagnating progress, or even regression in some regions, on women’s participation in public and political life and decision-making, and on the elimination of all forms of violence and discrimination against women and girls, inviting leaders to make use of research findings and data that expose existing gaps, and to mainstream intersectional approaches to gender equality at all spheres of government.

NOTICE that the COVID-19 pandemic has hit hard the whole of humanity, once again demonstrating that in times of crisis, women are among the first and most impacted, in their local areas, activities and lives. In face of the climate emergency and to building resilience, lessons can be drawn from the multiple consequences of this health crisis, on women everywhere in the world; and which challenge us to rethink the post-COVID-19 era differently;

UNDERLINE that the previous decade witnessed a visible drive against gender equality and women’s rights across continents, which has intensified as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and global crisis. We need to stop the backlash which targets the institutional and policy framework for gender equality, including gender mainstreaming, social and labor protection, education, sexual and reproductive health and rights, and the prevention and combating of violence against women and girls;

EMPHASIZE that the responsibility to attain greater gender equality and to safeguard and strengthen women's rights cannot fall solely on women, who already face accumulated barriers to their full engagement and influence and who are subject to additional scrutiny and gender bias. Gender inequality is the outcome of a historical power imbalance between men and women as groups, gender equality work must also involve boys and men, and challenge certain notions of masculinity (as well as norms for femininity) that are a barrier to true equality. Male leaders need to participate as allies in avoiding any form of regression and in working towards securing gender-responsive policies and gender-sensitive institutions, as a way to continue with the commitment to implement an international legal framework and to strengthen multilateral institutions and system.

Considering all the above, we:

COMMIT to improving the status of women and promoting gender equality focusing on women's ability to exercise real influence over their economic, social, political and cultural structures including the right to work and rights at work, and the universal access to social protection. Gender equality and the empowerment of women represent both a goal of, and a tool for, the sustainable development of all communities across the world, as laid out in SDG 5 of the 2030 Agenda, and as a cross-cutting topic across all goals and targets, particularly SDG 16, and in the Beijing Platform for Action;

INVITE leaders, women and allies, at all spheres of government to strengthen, promote and support the active, free and equal voice, agency, participation, leadership and representation of all women and girls in all their diversities and to sign, support and disseminate the call to action on Women's Leadership for the Post COVID-19 Era, considering the need to further investigate the particular impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women and girls and the unique potential of women's leadership in achieving a just, equitable and green recovery, with an specific role for women and girls.

CALL upon national governments and UN bodies gathered in New York for CSW65 to ensure compliance with international agreements and commitments at all levels, including the organization of audits and assessments on the progress to date, while defining monitoring and accountability mechanisms, including possible sanctions and international acknowledgment of the persistent gaps and regressions;

DEMAND the full and equal inclusion of women and girls in all spaces, explicitly addressing gaps in digital rights, and unequivocally denounce and protect against any and all forms of violence against women occurring in the ever-growing online sphere.

Women at the forefront of the pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed and amplified inequalities and weaknesses in our societies and illustrates the risks we face if we continue doing "business as usual". Crisis and health emergencies do not impact women and men in the same way. This basic acknowledgment will be critical to overcoming this, and future, pandemics and crises. As the global COVID-19 pandemic spreads, we witness the impact such a crisis is having on the sexual and reproductive rights of women. As availability and access are being compromised all around the globe, the barriers to access sexual and reproductive health services magnify.

Crises tend to have a disproportionate impact on women since they are more likely to work in informal environments. The contribution of women to paid and unpaid care work and the necessity of providing comprehensive local public services must not be ignored and should be valued as we establish a framework for the

recovery. In a context in which inequalities and polarization are increasing, gender-based violence and discrimination against women is also on the rise, often exacerbated by the precarious housing and confinement conditions, overburdening women with care responsibilities. In this regard, women must be systematically involved in COVID-19 specialized groups, task forces and response committees, as well as in legislative, policy and budgetary decision-making processes, in leadership positions and in seeking gender parity. Gender equality should be at the forefront of the recovery plans by reinforcing gender mainstreaming, gender-sensitive and gender-responsive policies, gender-sensitive budgeting, and the collection of intersectional and sex-disaggregated data to inform decision-making, during crises and always.

Women's participation & decision-making

Women remain underrepresented in public and political life, particularly in leadership positions across all spheres of government, including parliaments and deliberative bodies the private sector, and in all regions of the world. The active participation of women must be celebrated, encouraged and supported, in particular at local and subnational levels. The local level can be an important catalyst for both women's participation in politics and decision-making, and as a conduit for gender-sensitive policies and the promotion of equality.

Public administrations at local, regional, national and international levels, as well as political parties, must intensify efforts to improve women's representation in elected, administrative and appointed offices at the highest levels. We need to commit to and pursue gender-sensitive and gender-responsive institutions, as safe spaces for equal participation in equitable opportunities, and free of all forms of violence, discriminations and harmful practices against women. The impact of women in decision-making benefits the whole-of-society. Accordingly, women's engagement is a common responsibility, and must become a universal goal.

Democratic backsliding and feminist resistance

The rise of authoritarian and populist movements exacerbated by new priorities in the context of crisis threatens decades of progress on gender equality and women's empowerment. Standing up for women's rights is defending democracy and human rights. Local and regional governments are at the frontline to put in place mechanisms that guarantee sexual, reproductive, health and other rights. A broad coalition needs to be put in place, with local and regional government women leaders and allies, parliamentarians, and civil society, feminist, grassroots and community-based organizations, to defend the rights of all girls and women in their diversity and end impunity to all forms of discrimination against women, ensuring that this is on the top of the agenda in elections, policies and all relevant forums.

Women leading resilience

Women and girls, and in particular those living in poverty, are more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. They tend to face higher risks because of their gender-biased primary role in formal and informal care work, and food and water collection and management. Because of this particular role, they also represent an asset when considering recovery models and the ecological transition. The impacts of the climate crisis and more broadly, environmental degradation, are gendered, and the Commission on the Status of Women should therefore integrate this issue in every one of its upcoming sessions. The climate emergency and the need for preparedness during periods of crisis and distress require mechanisms, including territorial approaches, for gender-based responses and resilience. The path to the ecological transition must ensure climate justice and observe the specific impact of crises on women and girls.

Disinformation & data

The increasing importance of online tools and social media needs to be approached carefully. As women's rights and gender equality agendas find a powerful tool for dissemination and mobilization, online attacks and harassment also grow, in frequency, intensity and level of violence, disproportionately targeting women and their online networks. Awareness-raising campaigns, regulations, networks of support and redress mechanisms for the victims are fundamental to face pressing challenges and ensure women's digital rights. In response to rampant circulation of misinformation and disinformation, reliable data and evidence-based actions are powerful instruments. Particularly, monitoring frameworks, including by local and regional governments, need to utilise comprehensive indicators and produce data that can be disaggregated, particularly taking into consideration intersectionality and the differentiated identities and experiences among women of all ages, in all their diversity, including women with disabilities, LGBTQIA+, indigenous, women of colour, women from religious minorities, impoverished women, rural women and migrant women.

Towards a 5th World Conference on Women

We cannot allow any regression of gender equality in the face of increasing attacks and backlashes. It's time to reconvene the international community to defend women's rights in a new global conference. Previously agreed commitments should not only be maintained, rather strengthened and accelerated. Local and regional governments and leaders will continue to mobilize forces in defence of women's rights and gender equality.
