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Statement submitted by Socialist International Women, 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

The worldwide pandemic of COVID-19 has presents unprecedented levels of severe social and economic disruption with potentially devastating long-term effects on our global communities. The impact on women and girls, already disproportionately brutal, is predicted to push 47 million below the poverty line. At the same time, domestic violence increased significantly with millions of women and girls suffering within violent households with no means of support or escape. Collectively the global women's movement must ensure that women have a powerful voice in decision-making during this period to highlight urgent and critical women's issues as priorities to be addressed as societies and economies re-build and recover. To this end, it is essential that we take action now to insist that women and girls are heard at the highest levels of power and significantly involved in influential, effective ways in decision-making activities within both local communities and national governments.

These acute global circumstances sharply highlight the many existing vulnerabilities and unacceptable inequalities experienced by women and girls worldwide. It is now more imperative that ever to stand firmly in solidarity with all women and girls to urgently push for the vital changes needed to make meaningful gender equality and women's empowerment a concrete reality. It is crucial that we all re-commit to the recommendations detailed in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) and the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, and keep insisting on women's rightful place at the heart of decision-making processes.

The Socialist International Women has always strongly supported and advocated for full and effective political participation of women as an essential element in the achievement of gender equality with a vision of gender parity within all national governments and local decision-making bodies. Globally there have been some huge positive changes over the years, but overall the progress of women within the political decision-making sphere remains disappointingly mixed across regions. In some areas women have a significant voice, influence and power, while in others women remain severely marginalised or entirely silenced and absent. As women make up roughly 50 per cent of the world's population it is startling that the latest available data shows that worldwide only 24.3 per cent of politicians in national parliaments are women. Of these, women hold only 20.7 per cent of government minister positions with only 11 women serving as Head of State. The picture is much the same within local government, with an overall average of 26 per cent of representatives being women. Solutions to support women in fully participating in decision-making include robustly challenging socio-cultural norms which suppress women's human rights and the abolishment of archaic laws which deny women a voice in political decision-making despite the fact that these decisions may directly affect their bodies, personal freedoms, livelihoods and ownership of assets. It is vital that women are coached, supported and given access to the education and training needed to facilitate them in successfully navigating decision-making processes that may be entirely unfamiliar to them. Enabling women to fully participate also includes mechanisms such as legislative candidate quotas or reserved seats to encourage female candidates to stand, and practical aspects such as adequate childcare provision during meeting sessions, or providing IT equipment to representatives so they may participate remotely where needed.

The fact is that prevailing systems of decision-making and government were developed purely to accommodate the needs and preferences of men; it is now time to fully revise these systems to also accommodate the needs and preferences of women.

For millions of women worldwide simply being female is potentially dangerous. Worldwide an estimated 35 per cent of women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence, with the rate being as high as 70 per cent in some regions and in 2017 alone 50,000 women were intentionally killed by an intimate partner or family member. Violence against women continues to be one of the most significant obstacles to the achievement of gender equality, which greatly diminishes the potential for sustainable peace and prosperity for all of us. Violence and the fear of violence against women is also one of the biggest barriers to women's participation in decision-making. The vulnerability of women and girls to violence can effectively stop women from expressing valid opinions or standing for political roles as this would attract attention to them and potentially violence. This must stop. Rooting out violence against women in all its forms, including threats of violence on social media platforms, must remain a top priority worldwide. One essential element of creating change in this area is to increase the perceived value of women in society on all levels, as equal partners with men. This includes fully appreciating and acknowledging the immense value of the roles many women perform within families and communities which create an environment of social nourishment, balance and peace. Educating children from a young age on the equal value of women and men is an essential starting point to nurture generations where gender equality is a natural expectation. At the same time all of us are responsible for proactively promoting gender equality within all aspects of our societies and governance and ensuring policies and legislation protect and reiterate a gender equality narrative.

Accelerating the rate of change towards gender equality is vital. Only by honouring and respecting the invaluable contributions of women as equal with men can our global community fully realise a sustainable, peaceful present and future.

Socialist International Women – a non-governmental organisation with consultative status at the United Nations Economic and Social Council – reconfirms its commitment to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) by continuing to support its recommendations and facilitate discussions of gender equality issues at its meetings. The Socialist International Women recommits to encouraging its 140 member organisations to proactively campaign and advocate in their respective countries and urge their governments to implement policies, legislation and initiatives that support the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995). Socialist International Women also commits to contributing effectively to the sixty-fifth session of the Commission on the Status of Women.

The Socialist International Women takes this opportunity to call upon all Member States, the United Nations, state structures and Non-Governmental Organisations to take urgent action to significantly accelerate the rate of gender equality change in their regions and nations by implementing the actions and recommendations detailed in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995). Socialist International Women also urges support for the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals, with specific emphasis on taking urgent action on accelerating women's full and effective participation and decision-making in public life, as well as the elimination of violence, for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls by:

Driving transformation of decision-making and political processes by prioritising vital gender sensitive changes. Proactively encouraging and enabling full and meaningful participation of women in decision-making at local and national level by implementation of practical support mechanisms such as legislative candidate quotas or reserved seats, childcare provision, coaching and training and provision of IT technologies which enable women to participate remotely where needed;

Reinforcing the principles of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) within political rhetoric, party policies and manifestoes including actively implementing strategies which encourage and support women to fully engage in party governance and decision-making at all levels and strongly promoting the principle of gender parity within political parties and governmental hierarchies;

Addressing systemic gender inequalities within local and national policies and legislation, particularly regarding participation within decision-making processes, but also including issues such as land and property rights, access to education, pay inequalities, healthcare provision and effective legislation to protect women and girls from all forms of violence against women;

Challenging cultural and societal norms which perpetuate damaging patriarchal beliefs and behaviours which are demeaning and disempowering to women. Establishing an environment of on-going education and discussion of gender equality issues which re-set societal narratives to normalise gender equality in all areas of public and private life, particularly in regard to violence against women and women's right to involvement in high level decision-making;

Promoting the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) agenda and the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, specifically SDG5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. Encouraging realisation of the social democratic principles of wealth sharing, social responsibility, gender equality and inclusivity within communities, education, commerce and government institutions.
