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Statement submitted by International Federation of Social Workers, 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 International Federation of Social Workers recognizes the significance of the review and assessment of current challenges that affect the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women and its contribution towards the full realization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the priority theme for the 69th Session on the Commission on the Status of Women.

Our federation encompasses 153 country-members and is the global voice for the profession; we strive for social justice, human rights, and sustainable social development through the promotion of social work, best practice models and the facilitation of international cooperation. Our 2021 Policy Social Work and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals affirms our support for, and role in, achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development through sharing knowledge and continuing to co-create solutions that promote social change and social development while standing against exploitation of people and nature and against unjust structures that allow for wealth concentration in the hands of the few.

Our work with partners from trade unions, professional organizations and social movement groups resulted in the People's Charter for an Eco-social World in 2022. Collectively, we promote co-building a new eco-social world grounded in a holistic human rights framework inclusive of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, ecosystem rights and the broader rights of nature. Addressing the current challenges that affect the achievement of gender equality and empowerment of women requires this holistic approach that is grounded in local and global expertise and a commitment to a fairer, safer and more sustainable world.

The areas that we will address from the Platform for Action are women and health, women and the economy, and violence against women from the perspective of the People's Charter for an Eco-social World. The climate crisis and global inequality are key challenges that are drivers of migration and displacement, war and conflict, threats to social and economic rights, health, safety, livelihoods, and security, the burdens of which disproportionately affect women and girls (UN Women, 2022), increasing the interconnected risks of poor health, violence, displacement, and poverty.

Women's Health

Women's health is impacted by gender discrimination, income and social protection gaps, education, food insecurity, housing, structural conflict, access to quality affordable health services, and climate change (WHO, 2024). Globally, women often face greater food insecurity and lack of social protection compared to men, despite being central to the care economy- performing 76.2% of unpaid care work (UNDP, 2024) and making up 67% of the global paid health and social care workforce (WHO, 2024), including social workers.

Women's sexual and reproductive health has improved over time, but maternal mortality rates continue to be high; almost 95% of all maternal deaths occurred in low and lower middle-income countries. Most were preventable, highlighting inequalities in access to quality health services and gaps between the rich and the poor (WHO, 2024). Humanitarian and conflict settings present additional challenges to reducing maternal mortality and women's overall physical and mental health (Gender Snapshot, 2024). Climate change is an additional challenge as air pollution and heat exposure are associated with preterm birth, low birth weight and poorer maternal health and complications during pregnancy (World Economic Forum, 2024).

In May 2024, our organization and World Health Organization announced a partnership to build capacity at the community level, empowering individuals to identify their own health priorities and holistic treatments through self-determination principles. Through this partnership, social workers will co-build connections between communities and public health services and champion policies that provide women with reproductive autonomy, equitable maternal care, and comprehensive mental health support.

Women and the Economy

Investing in the care economy is a pivotal step towards women's economic empowerment by investing in society, supporting dignified working conditions with living wages, and strengthening healthcare infrastructure for all populations. This investment would enable women to secure decent work and would also support the development of preventative and responsive health protection systems. Co-building preventive and responsive social protection systems that prioritize rights and wellbeing is central to the People's Charter for an Eco-Social World, which advocates for governments to invest in a new strategy to support communities now and be better prepared for future crises.

Violence Against Women

Decades of progress in tackling violence against women have been reversed by deepened structural inequalities and climate change which have increased the drivers of violence against women (UN Women, 2023). Extreme weather events exacerbate economic and food insecurity, which in turn heightens the risk of sexual and gender-based violence. For instance, emergency shelters or damaged infrastructure increase opportunities for perpetrators of violence (UNICEF, 2023). Globally, one in eight women and girls were subjected to sexual and/or physical violence by an intimate partner in the previous year (UN Women, 2024), with 95% of conflict related sexual-violence affecting women and girls (Amnesty International, 2024).

Geopolitical conflicts in countries such as South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo, along with poverty and food insecurity in Nigeria and Somalia, make women particularly vulnerable to violence. In Latin America and around the world, Indigenous women face unreported and unpunished violence, often fearing shame or further harm if they speak out. The International Federation of Social Workers Indigenous Commission addresses the issue of the thousands of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW) and gender non-conforming individuals who are missing or have been murdered (2024).

Female Genital Mutilation is another form of violence linked to climate change through interconnected pathways such as poverty, child marriage, school disruption, displacement and conflict (UNICEF, 2023). Our members, regional social work associations in Africa and Asia-Pacific, illustrate and champion the urgent need to invest in survivor-led movements against female genital mutilation, recognise their leadership, and foster investments and initiatives that advocate for their rights and well-being.

The People's Charter emphasizes "Buen Vivir", a holistic approach to living that promotes love and care for people and the planet, and opposes violence and discrimination. This vision of an eco-social world values the safety and dignity of women as part of its fundamental principles.

Recommendations

International Federation of Social Workers supports the Commission on the Status of Women with the following recommendations with recognition of the

significance of the review of the Beijing Platform for Action and its contribution to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as an opportunity to assess progress toward gender equality and the empowerment of women in the context of co-building an eco-social world. It is essential that partnerships between the United Nations, civil society, and social work profession are supported, and committed to including women in all decision-making bodies. International Federation of Social Workers makes the following recommendations:

- **Raise Awareness on Climate and Gender-Based Violence:** Promote regional and international collaboration to raise awareness of the connection between climate change and gender-based violence through intersectional strategies, gender sensitive training, human rights-based approaches, and challenges to patriarchal norms;
- **Foster Sustainable and Gender-Equitable Cultures:** Global, national, and local governments, alongside people's assemblies, must co-build cultures that prioritize sustainability through holistic approaches and co-developing in solutions, human rights, and gender equity. This includes environments where women's health, autonomy, and well-being are safeguarded;
- **Support Survivor-Led Movements:** Invest in, amplify and support survivor-led movements against sexual and gender-based violence against women, as their insights are key to creating meaningful change;
- **Challenge Patriarchy:** Expand initiatives that challenge patriarchal norms and violence, especially in conflict zones to promote restorative justice and human dignity as part of creating eco-social systems where all women and vulnerable groups are free from oppression and harm and can live in power balanced society;
- **Invest in Social Workers:** Prioritize investments in social workers. This includes acknowledging their contributions to community economic and social well-being, our role in realizing the principles of Buen Vivir and supporting the national associations to become a nationally and globally recognized professional voice for social change and strong communities;
- **Ensure Universal Access to Sexual and Reproductive Health:** Guarantee universal access to sexual and reproductive health services as outlined in the Pact for the Future and Beijing Platform for Action. These services are fundamental to women's autonomy and must be integrated into a global eco-social approach that respects women's rights in all environments;
- **Promote Peace that involves co-living with nature and mutual respect for diversity** are responsibilities that each of us has and governments of all levels should co-lead this change.