



## Economic and Social Council

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**High-level segment: annual ministerial review**

### **Statement submitted by International Federation of Business and Professional Women, 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 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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\* E/2012/100.



## **Statement**

### **Background**

Gender-based economic inequity is an important issue in both developed and developing countries. There is not a single country in the world where gender-based inequities do not exist. In developed economies, the issue is most visible in relation to pay and conditions of employment. In developing nations, other forms of economic discrimination are endemic.

As an example, in the European Union and Australia, women earn on average 17.5 per cent less than men. In the United States of America, the differential is 23 per cent.

In Africa, according to the United Nations Development Programme *Human Development Report*, women represent 52 per cent of the total population, contribute approximately 75 per cent of the agricultural work and produce 60 per cent to 80 per cent of the food. Yet they earn only 10 per cent of African incomes and own just 1 per cent of the continent's assets.

The International Federation of Business and Professional Women is an influential international network of business and professional women from over 90 countries in five continents. Founded in 1930, the organization develops the professional, leadership and business potential of women on all levels through mentoring, networking, skills-building and economic empowerment programmes and projects around the world.

The three prominent worldwide initiatives of the organization aim to address gender-based economic inequity through the economic empowerment of women are:

- The equal pay day awareness campaign, launched in 2009 at the fifty-third session of the Commission on the Status of Women in New York
- Women's empowerment principles, launched in conjunction with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and the United Nations Global Compact, on International Women's Day in 2010; the seven principles are guide posts for leaders in business and government for actions that advance and empower women in the workplace, marketplace and community
- Women entrepreneurs, encouraging private and public sector sourcing from women's businesses

The remainder of the present statement describes the equal pay day awareness campaign of the organization and its role in the economic empowerment of women.

### **Pay equity**

Pay equity means being paid equally for work of equal or comparable value.

Some of the reasons for pay inequity and the worsening pay gap are:

- "Women's work" is undervalued
- In professions where women predominate, wages are generally lower than industry standards

- Women more often work part time and in temporary jobs that have reduced hourly pay rates
- Women interrupt their careers more frequently, for example, after pregnancy
- Women earn less than men because more men work in better-paid sectors and better-paid jobs
- Women often face a “glass ceiling”; they do not move on to senior positions even when they have the same qualifications as men
- Gender role stereotypes still predominate and our workforces are often segregated into “women’s work” and “men’s work”

Some 60 per cent of the world’s working poor are women, primarily because they work in part-time, contract and other forms of informal employment that are not only badly paid but also characterized by a lack of job security and all forms of social protection.

To fully understand the problem of the gender pay gap, it is important to know its consequences and influences on women’s futures. In Australia, for example, women have significantly less money saved for their retirement; half of all women aged 45 to 59 have \$8,000 or less in their pension funds, compared with \$31,000 for men.

In the United States, the poverty rate for elderly women is higher than that for men; in 1997, the poverty rate for elderly women was 13.1 per cent, compared with 7 per cent for men. Among unmarried elderly women, the poverty rate was significantly higher, at about 19 per cent.

### **Equal pay day awareness campaign**

In response to these issues, the organization launched its equal pay day awareness campaign, which includes work to improve pay equity and an international task force to coordinate its worldwide activities. The most important goals of the task force are:

- A transparent salary system for companies
- A proportional amount of women on committees or in executive positions
- Improved conditions for working mothers
- Discrimination-free job evaluation
- More women in full-time jobs

The spread of the campaign has been impressive. Such campaigns are now run regularly on all continents and help attract many new organizations, supporters and partners. The number of organized events within each country keeps growing every year.

The International Federation of Business and Professional Women also holds side events each year at the sessions of the Commission on the Status of Women to encourage women to become better informed and active at the local, national and international levels, to achieve equal pay, representation and opportunities for women everywhere.