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

### **Statement submitted by International Alliance of 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

One way to promote productive capacity, employment and decent work to eradicate poverty in the context of inclusive, sustainable and equitable economic growth at all levels for achieving the Millennium Development Goals is by investing in women and girls. It is generally accepted that the majority of poor people across the world are women. Poor women are particularly disadvantaged, even in relation to poor men, in their own societies because of inequalities in power between the two sexes that help to create and perpetuate women's poverty.

For poor people, poverty means ill health and premature death, social exclusion, lack of access to basic services, having no say in basic decisions that affect them and vulnerability to violence. Poor people have no choices as to what they can do with their lives. However, on top of that, women have to contend with systematic discrimination against them. Discrimination against women causes and perpetuates vast poverty. Empowerment of women is therefore part of the solution to the problem. In that regard, we have to work hard to change gender stereotypes so that women's rights are established and do not exist only on paper.

Unfortunately, the economic recession has had a disproportionate negative effect on women's right to work. In the formal sector, women were already facing greater job insecurity and lower wages and, as a result, they were hit harder.

Women have also emerged as the flexible labour force par excellence for the highly competitive labour-intensive sector of the global economy. Flexible labour can be drawn upon or dropped depending on market conditions, relegating those jobs to the informal sector without any job security or benefits.

Reduced consumption resulting from the economic crisis led to a major decline in the trade and manufacturing sector. The effect on women in vulnerable jobs was tremendous. Millions of women lost their jobs.

Increasing unemployment and decreasing household incomes lead to an increase in unpaid work, including caregiving (a job mostly done by women and girls), and force women to turn to or remain in informal employment.

Women also tend to be most affected by cuts in public spending. These affect sectors such as education, health, and sanitation, which are essential services for households and families that can provide the support that women need. Social spending brings about well-being and opportunities, and can play a fundamental role in combating poverty, in particular women's poverty.

There is also a need to support women's right to work by recognizing and making more visible the unpaid work performed by women. We should reduce the burden of such work on them by promoting equal sharing of responsibilities between men and women in caregiving. As a response to the crisis, countries must work to enhance women's productive capacity, support income-generating activities and ensure that microfinance reaches women.

Women need to participate fully in decision-making processes in order to ensure that attention is paid to gender perspectives in policy responses to the financial crisis. States should take measures to ensure a gender approach in the design and implementation of recovery measures, which should prioritize investment in education and skills. There is a need for investment in sectors where

women make up a considerable proportion of the labour force and to budget to ensure that women benefit equally from public investment.

Investing in women and girls is fundamental not only to gender equity and women's empowerment but also to poverty reduction, development and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

The crisis is an opportunity to rethink the economic order. We need to move towards an order that would have as its function the survival of humanity in a human way. A solidarity-based and justice-oriented economic order that would promote gender equality and human rights for women and men, and that would give preference to provision for all and cooperation over unlimited growth and maximizing profit, would contribute to the durability of society.

We do not know at this moment what the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development will be. We strongly oppose all language that goes back on human rights. We know and regret that at its fifty-sixth session, in 2012, the Commission on the Status of Women did not agree on conclusions as a result of references to gender equality and reproductive health and rights. We think that, in addition to our future, the future of the United Nations is at stake when we cannot rely on it to protect agreed language and binding conventions.

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