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Statement submitted by League of Women Voters of the United States, 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.



Statement

Unleashing the power of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women

With the topic of preventing violence against women and girls, the Commission on the Status of Women has an unique opportunity not only to shed light on this prevalent problem but also to make systemic changes to the way that the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and the United Nations work with actors to eradicate human rights violations. The League of Women Voters of the United States is pleased to present this paper to identify processes and techniques that have been successful for us in enfranchising women in the political arena.

First, we must identify the strengths. UN-Women can and does provide a vehicle to assemble many actors to share research, individual stories and some success stories. It is a powerful vehicle. There is no other organization on Earth that has the same clout as the United Nations. Nevertheless, the assembly of actors and, specifically, change agents could be more inclusive of businesses and individuals with star power and thus a better ability to influence people.

The topics or problems covered by UN-Women are important and will make a difference to the well-being not only of individuals but also of communities and nations. Organizationally, there are many different attempts to solve the problems. UN-Women has a unique opportunity to combine these different attempts so that the voice or message is clear enough for people to rally behind and attack the root causes, not just the symptoms. For example, trafficking is a problem that seems to be getting worse, not better. UN-Women has held many assemblies on the topic but many actors are organizing efforts to attack symptoms, such as through victim services. While that is important, it will not solve the problem. The root cause is demand for trafficked individuals. If UN-Women were to assemble Governments, businesses (which provide the money for buyers), education leaders, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), religious leaders, the media and stars for a round table to identify ways to influence change on the demand side, the accomplishments could be enormous.

Second, there is a need to identify what UN-Women does to influence change. UN-Women continues to be a vital force in reaching out to the United Nations system, Member States and NGOs affiliated to the United Nations. Those NGOs are on the ground guiding efforts in many regions of the globe. To truly change attitudes and enable individuals in local communities to solve the problems on the ground, however, UN-Women needs help in reaching change makers. For example, violence in the name of honour is a form of cultural attitude. However, let us imagine what could happen if the popular media were to develop soap operas or other forms of popular entertainment that would examine the issue on an individual story basis. This campaign would also have to first enlist the aid of influence makers and leaders in the community who can effect change in people's attitudes, disseminating the message that it is not honourable to harm a human being. Working in concert, these influence makers could then work to get the word out much more effectively.

Third, we must ask how UN-Women helps to sustain change. UN-Women is already well aware of the importance of the concept of measure and display and is

working with Member States to gather statistics. Perhaps UN-Women can, however, simplify the communication of statistics into a single scorecard or rating mechanism. In the business world, brevity is powerful. A one-page document describing the issue, the plan to deal with it in major terms and how efforts are faring, sometimes using red, yellow or green indicators, is a powerful and simple tool. When an individual, department or company has to measure and display progress or the achievement of a goal, it focuses the efforts in one direction. By way of example, UN-Women has a project to place women in political office across the world. Each Member State is providing statistics on achieving the goal. The statistics could be displayed by State and progress ranked as an effective tool for working with States to increase participation. Publicizing the rankings and a summary for all States is an effective tool for communication outside the United Nations, getting the message to other decision makers as well as motivating self-improvement.

In summary, UN-Women, as part of the United Nations and as a newer organization, has an opportunity to structure itself to take advantage of the techniques that work. Those techniques are:

- (a) Identifying the root cause of the problem;
- (b) Simplifying the message so that people can readily understand it and get involved;
- (c) Reaching influence makers and the popular media in a coordinated campaign so that they can help to change attitudes;
- (d) Utilizing the concept of measure and display for monitoring progress, motivating self-improvement and communicating to actors both inside and outside the United Nations;
- (e) Assembling different actors, including businesses, the media, influence makers, NGOs, Member States and United Nations agencies, to conduct projects to solve problems;
- (f) Publicizing results and efforts.

UN-Women has already started down the path towards using some of these techniques. The League of Women Voters of the United States looks forward to continuing to work in helping to resolve the issues affecting women and girls in the political process.
