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to the special session of the General Assembly entitled
“Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for
the twenty-first century**

Statement submitted by Education International, International Trade Union Confederation and Public Services International, 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.



Statement

It has been 20 years: are we there yet?

Assessing implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action from a trade union perspective

More than 70 million women workers are represented in trade unions today, and, over the past 20 years, they have built a legacy of winning rights and protections in the workplace. Unionized women earn more than non-unionized women and have been instrumental in negotiating fairer wages, paid maternity and paternity leave and access to social protection through collective bargaining and social dialogue and in mobilizing workers who had previously not been unionized. As a result of a global campaign led by trade unions and domestic workers that was supported by groups promoting human, women's and migrants' rights, 10 million domestic workers have recently won the right to minimum or higher wages, social protections, the regulation of working time, one day off per week and other rights. The campaign led to the ratification of International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 189 and labour law reforms in more than 12 countries.

Through collective bargaining, social dialogue and local and global campaigns, unionized women have advanced women's rights in a number of critical areas outlined in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action such as women's economic rights, including access to employment, resources, markets and trade; the elimination of occupational segregation and all forms of employment discrimination; access to quality public services; and promotion of the harmonization of work and family responsibilities for women and men.

For the most part, however, the promises of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action remain unfulfilled. Women have moved mountains over the past 20 years, but cannot fully enjoy or celebrate all that they have achieved. We know that:

- Seventy per cent of the world's poor are women
- The global gender pay gap remains at almost 23 per cent
- Women are overrepresented in low status, poorly paid, informal, part-time, insecure and precarious work
- Women's unpaid care work remains marginalized in social and economic policymaking, although it is estimated to contribute between 15 and 50 per cent of the gross domestic product (over \$25 trillion worldwide)
- Unequal distribution of care responsibilities between the State and families and between women and men continues to hamper women's effective participation in the labour force and their access to decent work
- Millions of girls do not receive an education because of poverty, child labour, institutional and traditional barriers, early marriage, lack of safety getting to and from school, lack of separate sanitary facilities, sexual harassment and violence in schools, unwanted pregnancies and domestic work overload.

And still we rise — women's labour priority areas beyond 2015

Inequality has split the world; 80 per cent of the world's population lives on less than \$10 per day. The wage share of national income has been steadily declining for decades, in parallel with the erosion of labour market institutions and more austerity measures and neo-liberal policies worldwide. Poverty relief and gender equality should be linked to income growth and wages. Equal pay and a living minimum wage should be part of social and economic policy goals. However, many reforms are being negotiated that will have a debilitating impact on regulation in the public interest and pose a serious threat to democracy because those negotiations are taking place without parliamentary scrutiny.

A new architecture for the global and local economy is required in which decent work, universal access to social protections, an economic agenda for care work and environmental sustainability are the cornerstones. Redirected investments can provide the funds needed to finance social protections, a living minimum wage, education for all and renewable energy to halt climate change. Therefore, we call for tax justice, an end to tax havens, tax avoidance and corruption, and the addressing of race-to-the-bottom tax incentives and regional tax competition policies.

The austerity measures introduced in response to the recent global economic crisis and public spending cuts in developed and developing nations alike have had a disproportionate impact on women and girls. There has been an unprecedented rise in the share of work that is informal and precarious, in which women have been overrepresented. Cuts in public spending are increasingly leading to the privatization of education, which tends to reinforce social exclusion. Increased regulation of private actors does not sufficiently counteract the systemic discrimination borne by girls when education becomes marketized. Education must be seen as a public good, rather than as a commodity, if women and girls are to fully enjoy the right to education. A renewed emphasis on States' obligation to fulfil the right to education is needed in order for women and girls to enjoy their right to education in practice and so that education is truly transformative as a human right.

Policymakers must address the inequitable distribution of unpaid care work and free millions of women to participate more fully and equitably in the interrelated spheres of employment, education and public decision-making. Including unpaid care work considerations in economic policymaking will lead to the building of more resilient economies and more just societies by reducing gender and income inequalities and enhancing human capabilities.

We demand a bold shift from political leaders; from inaction to targeted investments and labour reforms aimed at building an inclusive labour market that secures women's equal access to paid and decent work, their representation in decision-making and their ability to access to quality public services and quality education. Investment in the care work economy recognizes the real value of care work, often provided through unpaid or grossly underpaid labour that is invisible within statistics. It also can break down gender stereotypes and occupational segregation, and have a positive impact on the gender pay gap by challenging traditional gender roles. Universal access to quality public services is fundamental to building just and equitable societies. Market mechanisms have their place, but they have proven incapable of ensuring universal access.

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action recognized that violence against women and girls violates and impairs or nullifies the enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms. Domestic violence is the most widespread form of violence against women and girls and is the main cause of homicides of women worldwide. An estimated 246 million girls and boys are victims of school-related violence every year; although both girls and boys can be targets, girls are the most vulnerable. Violence is a serious barrier to learning, and violence in the workplace is a widespread phenomenon that affects millions of women and affects certain groups of vulnerable women disproportionately.

The realization of women's universal human rights and the empowerment and promotion of women to leadership positions are crucial elements of an agenda to eliminate violence against women and girls. The respect and promotion of women's civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights are essential to ensuring women's autonomy and capacity to escape violent situations. Access to health care and social services, childcare, education, housing, food and basic income security are inextricably linked to women's vulnerability to different manifestations of violence against them.

The way forward

Women in trade unions urge Governments to take bold steps to deliver on the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, especially as they negotiate the new sustainable development framework to be adopted in 2015.

We call on Governments to do the following:

- (a) Live up to past commitments to uphold and support the respect of fundamental rights at work, and significantly expand women's access to paid employment and decent work, through investment in quality public services, including childcare and elderly care, education and health that realistically address the care work economy;
- (b) Establish robust, well-set minimum wage mechanisms to address increasing in-work poverty by ensuring a living wage; social protection floors in accordance with ILO recommendation No. 202 and ILO Convention No. 102 to ensure the provision of universal access to essential health care, maternity care and basic social security guarantees such as income security for children, older persons and for persons of working age unable to earn wages owing to sickness, unemployment, maternity or disability;
- (c) Carry out labour reforms to comply with the core ILO standards and gender equality Conventions, including No. 87, No. 98, No. 29 and its protocol, No. 182, No. 111, No. 100, No. 156, No. 183 and No. 189;
- (d) Eliminate gender-based violence at work, including through the adoption of international labour standards;
- (e) Strengthen labour market institutions, including collective bargaining, social dialogue and labour inspectorates, which have proven effective in reducing the feminization of poverty;
- (f) Carve out public services from free trade agreements;

(g) Introduce tax systems that are progressive, properly resourced and enforced and that provide means of economic self-sufficiency at all levels;

(h) Link poverty relief to income growth and wages to address inequality, ensure that gender equality and women's human rights are mainstreamed throughout the post-2015 framework — and adopt stand-alone goals on full, productive employment and decent work for all, national social protection floors, education and gender equality. Targets and indicators must be included to assess living minimum wage levels, job creation for women and men, the achievement of components of social protection floors and the adequacy of financing (as a percentage of the gross domestic product) to support implementation of the new sustainable development framework.
