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**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and
to the special session of the General Assembly entitled
“Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for
the twenty-first century”**

Statement submitted by Make Mothers Matter, 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

Women and the economy — women and poverty — education and training of women

Make Mothers Matter recommendations

Make Mothers Matter welcomes the fifty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women to review the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, as well as the opportunity to contribute to the integration of the specific perspectives of women who are mothers in the post-2015 development agenda.

Progress has been achieved towards gender equality in some critical areas of concern and Make Mothers Matter welcomes the efforts made by all nations. However, there is still room for improvement. We would like to focus our recommendations on the women and poverty, women and the economy, and education and training of women sections.

Voicing concerns of mothers from all around the world, Make Mothers Matter would like to emphasize chapter II, paragraph 29, of the Beijing Platform for Action regarding maternity:

The social significance of maternity, motherhood and the role of parents in the family and in the upbringing of children should be acknowledged. The upbringing of children requires shared responsibility of parents, women and men and society as a whole. Maternity, motherhood, parenting and the role of women in procreation must not be a basis for discrimination nor restrict the full participation of women in society. Recognition should also be given to the important role often played by women in many countries in caring for other members of their family.

In order to fully acknowledge and support the role of women who are mothers, concrete actions should be taken to reconcile work and family life. The actions are essential to achieve the gender equality and women empowerment goals from the Beijing Platform for Action as they can support women's employment, alleviate poverty and foster economic independence.

Conciliation between work and family life is a major issue, in particular for mothers. But it concerns us all: individuals, parents, children, older people, companies, public authorities and therefore urgent action should be taken at all levels.

Given the general trend towards a rising life expectancy, the traditional life course and career path must be reconsidered. Instead of the "rush-hour" period of intense work and career coupled with having children and starting a young family, this stretched working life could benefit from more flexibility with a long-term vision.

In the workplace, mothers encounter systematic disadvantages in pay, perceived competencies, and benefits compared to childless women. Specifically, they may suffer a per-child wage penalty (on average a reduction of 12 per cent of their salary per child), resulting in a pay gap between non-mothers and mothers that

is larger than the gap between men and women (this gap increases in old age: in Europe, the pension gap between men and women is 39 per cent).

Make Mothers Matter would like to make the following recommendations in this respect. They mainly derive from the results of an online survey that Make Mothers Matter conducted in 2011 in 16 European countries, targeting women who are mothers, with more than 11,000 respondents.

In this survey, called “What mothers in Europe want”, mothers gave as their primary concerns: the lack of time for their children, the lack of recognition for their role as mothers and the absence of choices when it comes to balancing their work and family lives.

They also expressed their desire to be present in the labour market and spend time educating their children, giving priority to one or another depending on the ages and number of children.

Recommendations for Governments

(a) Provide accessible, affordable and high-quality public services and infrastructures, in particular in the most disadvantaged and remote areas, with a focus on addressing the issue of women’s “time poverty”. Water, electricity, energy, information and communications technology, transportation, accessible childcare and health care are all necessary to significantly reduce the time spent on unpaid family care work, mostly supported by women, and thus make time for remunerated activities;

(b) Make unpaid family care work visible to policymakers and society at large by conducting time-use surveys which reflect real time spent in order to assess its monetary value as a percentage of the gross domestic product (GDP), estimated to be between 10 and 50 per cent of GDP, according to the October 2013 report of the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Magdalena Sepúlveda Carmona; and include unpaid family care work in alternative economic and social indicators currently under consideration to measure well-being (e.g. Beyond GDP, genuine progress indicator);

(c) Build on the resolution adopted at the International Conference of Labour Statisticians of the International Labour Organization, to legally recognize unpaid family care work as a being a particular category of labour that produces rights (e.g. access to social security, education and training, a voice in the democratic system, etc.);

(d) In particular, recognize the periods dedicated to unpaid family care work in the calculation of pension rights (“care credits”), as these periods are essential to societies’ well-being. This must not be seen as a cost, but as an investment in childhood and human capital, with a positive impact in other areas: recognition of the social and educational role of parents, prevention of women’s poverty, prevention of social and health problems linked to burnout and stress, prevention of violence and the dropping out of school, higher fertility rates, etc.

Recommendations for Governments, the private sector and other stakeholders, as appropriate

(a) Facilitate discontinuous rather than linear career paths, allowing men and women to leave the labour market partially or completely to educate and care for their children or dependent relatives, and then re-enter it without being heavily penalized;

(b) Promote the regulation of quality part-time work and job-sharing schemes allowing men and women to adjust their workload to their family responsibilities, and eliminate any type of discrimination against part-time workers (i.e. mainly mothers) regarding career advancement, pay level, social security, pension rights, etc.;

(c) Address the “motherhood penalty” and the growing inequality and discrimination between parents and non-parents by recognizing and validating the competencies and skills acquired and developed while performing unpaid family care work to facilitate re-entry into the labour market after a career break;

(d) Facilitate access to lifelong education in order to ensure that women of all ages can acquire and develop the knowledge, capacities, aptitudes and skills needed to fully participate in the paid labour market;

(e) Promote and support equal sharing of care responsibilities between men and women (e.g. through paternity leave, parental leave, awareness-raising and education, etc.). This will allow men to take care of their children from the beginning, which will make it more likely that they will continue doing so during the whole of childhood;

(f) Change current legislation and practices to enable women’s right to full and equal access to economic resources, including the right to inheritance, ownership of land and other property, access to credit, etc.
