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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 Solar Cookers International, 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

Solar Cookers International fully supports the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and the Beijing Platform for Action. We anticipate fully participating in aiding and supporting the implementation of the post-2015 goals. The poorest populations in the world, a group of more than 3 billion, live mainly in Africa, Asia and the Pacific and Latin America, which are rich in solar energy, but poor in biomass and fossil fuels. The most vulnerable are women and children, who can benefit significantly from the adoption of solar thermal technology to meet household cooking needs and for water pasteurization.

The Millennium Development Goals set out essential steps to improving the lives of women, girls and their families. To date, there is evidence of improvement as a result of progress in the attainment of all eight Goals. Reducing the burden of cooking and water pasteurization tasks is at the heart of improving the daily lives of women, children, families and communities.

Gender, technology, agriculture and entrepreneurship are also concerns of Solar Cookers International. They are addressed in our mission and explicitly prioritized in our global goals. Solar cooking requires free solar energy for cooking processes and water pasteurization. The tasks of cooking and water pasteurization are overwhelmingly the province of women and children, crippling their potential to be educated, to enjoy good health and to escape from poverty.

Using solar energy, and supplementing it with biomass or fossil fuels only when it is not available, leads to a significant improvement in health, safety, quality of life and the environment. The economic benefits of solar energy and water pasteurization are multiple. Poor families spend a large part of their meagre resources on purchasing charcoal, wood, dung and other biomass, as well as liquefied petroleum gas. By prioritizing the use of solar thermal energy, family income can be redirected to meeting alternative needs.

Women save money and time by using solar thermal cookers, allowing them to invest in other areas of economic growth. The money saved is used to pay for education and more food and to meet basic sanitary and health needs. Time is also a valuable economic resource for women. Because food can be left unattended in solar thermal cookers, women have time free to spend with family and community members, begin microenterprises, receive education or rest and improve their health. In short, solar cooking can help women to reach their full human potential. With a reduction in the time that they spend collecting cooking fuel, women in agriculture will now be able to turn their attention to improving their farming skills. Having time freed up in this way makes it possible for women to devote more time to growing additional crops for their families, if they are primary food providers, thereby increasing food security. Less time spent searching for biomass means less exposure to the dangers of rape, theft, abduction and murder. Best of all, girls can turn those hours of drudgery into hours of education.

The social benefits of solar thermal cooking include increased gender equality and greater participation of women in community leadership. Cooking has, in almost all cultures, been the domain of women and girls. Positive changes introduced in this area improve the well-being of families and communities. Solar thermal cooking can positively expand women's independence.

The use of solar thermal cooking reduces the number of traditional cooking fires. Such fires emit black carbon, a climate-forcing agent. As a zero-emissions cooking technology, solar cooking has considerable capacity to improve air quality globally. Halting deforestation is another significant aim with regard to sustainable development and tackling climate change. Ultimately, desertification results from the removal of wood, crop residue and other biological materials from the environment to be used as cooking fuel. Solar thermal cookers permit trees to remain in the environment, creating a vital carbon sink that helps to cool the planet.

Solar thermal cooking helps to improve family and community health, the economy and the quality of the physical environment. With free solar energy, household air pollution is reduced and contaminated water pasteurized. With the time and money saved, health care, entrepreneurship, stronger families and an educated citizenry become possible.

For more than 25 years, Solar Cookers International has been the leader in spreading solar thermal cooking and water pasteurization knowledge globally.
