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“Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for
the twenty-first century”**

Statement submitted by Transdiaspora Network, 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.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

It is estimated that 52 per cent of people living with HIV/AIDS in low and middle-income countries are women (United Nations AIDS Gap Report, 2014). For women in their reproductive years, HIV/AIDS is the leading cause of death worldwide (World Health Organization Fact Sheet, 2013). In 2013, almost 60 per cent of all new HIV infections among young people aged 15-24 occurred among adolescent girls and young women (United Nations AIDS Fact Sheet, 2014). In the United States, African Americans and Hispanics represent 27 per cent of all women, but they account for 79 per cent of HIV cases among women. African-American women have an HIV prevalence rate nearly four times that of white women (U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2014). These statistics bring about the urgent need to reflect and redirect our attention to the devastating reality that women face: HIV/AIDS is still a leading encumbrance in their lives.

Transdiaspora Network, an award-winning social enterprise organization in the field of youth development and HIV prevention, believes that promoting health among teen girls and young women in the 21st century should go beyond their physical well-being and the very biomedical understanding of the concept. Based on our evidence-based curriculum and field work experience, our team acknowledges that promoting health is not only about protecting young women from sexually transmitted diseases, but also about identifying and providing cultural antibodies that allow them to assess risks and opportunities, and organically expand their personal goals as well as their vision of a future linked to empowering social milieus. Our overall mission is in complete accordance with the objective of the Beijing Declaration's Platform for Action: the empowerment of all women.

During our fact-finding missions to local communities, we have expressed our commitment to raising awareness around women and girls' vulnerability to HIV. Our conversation has focused on the various factors driving HIV infection among women, including violence, intergenerational sex, human rights violations and cross-cultural traditional practices. These visits gave us exceptional insight to the challenges facing these strong and resilient young women and mothers and helped broaden our understanding of the different challenges affecting communities in the New York metropolitan area. Our findings revealed that the best way to eliminate mother-to-child transmission of HIV is to prevent women from being infected in the first place. We therefore strived to reach out to a wide range of young audiences of young women with prevention messages and by lending our voice to amplify their needs to the world. From a 17-year-old girl at our community blog: "This is why it is important to stress the dangers and signs of potential critical lifestyles because starting with young people we can change the statistics".

We practice health promotion by encouraging program participants as well as interns to improve their negotiation skills, expand their social opportunities, elevate their personal expectations beyond traditional roles and explore new alternatives for economic self-sufficiency. Our organization makes sure that every single teenage girl and young woman as well as professional women in leading management positions are all included in decision-making processes. A good example is that four of our female representatives were invited to attend the United Nations AIDS High-level side event "Fast Track: Ending AIDS by 2030," (25/09/2014) and a symposium to commemorate the 2014 National Latino AIDS Awareness Day

organized by the United States Department of Health and Human Services (15/10/2014).

We work in the stages of PRE-primary prevention, a term used by Dr. Anil Kabrawala to describe the uniqueness of our approach based on the three primary methods of preventative medicine: primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention. Our PRE-primary prevention model changes program participants' behaviour and way of thinking which in turn teaches them prevention. It is designed to encourage adolescents and young women to make informed decisions about their health and lifestyle.

Our curriculum's pioneering approach combines educational, recreational and therapeutic elements. Our unique RIPPLE Program, for instance, is centred on the notion of embodied knowledge and cultivation of multiple intelligences. Participants are given a different language to communicate with, drawn from their cultural reservoirs, as well as a venue where they can freely conceptualize and vocalize their feelings. The program combines three separate modules: Dance Mediation, Storytelling Dynamics, and Social Photography Workshop. In addition, we implement capacity building trainings and seminars while partnering with local high schools, community-based organizations, and city-wide agencies such as Young Women Catholic Association High School After School Program and The Brooklyn Hospital Center Family Program to reach a wide array of at-risk teens who would otherwise not have access to critical healthcare information.

Furthermore, we enable various youth-led community projects involving social and self-empowerment, as well as cultural communication and mentorship. These projects are embraced through our BOLD Initiative, an internship program for high school/college/graduate students to build leadership skills needed to catalyze community development not only in the field of HIV prevention in general, but also for Brooklyn local neighbourhoods in need. Finally, we lead a larger community project named Tour to Health, where we foster collaborations in various ways with community-based organizations and local institutions from both public and private sectors, such as New York Public Library, Children's Health Fund and Caribbean House Health Center. The project also provides an opportunity for our young women leaders to interact with local residents and actively promote HIV testing.

Our PRE-primary prevention model provides a judgment-free environment to allow teenagers and young women from all backgrounds to speak freely about prevention. It also utilizes other "forms of language" including dance mediation, storytelling, and social photography. By using this approach, program participants develop the idea that healthcare and sexually-transmitted disease prevention is not just "black or white", "right or wrong", and "life or death", but rather more fluid, dynamic, and personable. In our day-to-day activities, our organization raises awareness about HIV prevention through culturally-proficient programs that are in line with the commitment made by the Millennium Development Goals of halting and reversing the spread of HIV by 2015. Our mission is also supported by the United Nations AIDS post-2015 Development Agenda to better support key populations and ensure that the most marginalized are not left behind.

Engaging with culture means working within the "cultural logic" of each individual and is closely aligned with our participatory development methods since it entails starting where young women are, respecting and recognizing their ability to decide and act on what is important in their lives. Our efforts in working within

“cultural logic” apply not only in diverse local communities in New York. We also collaborate with other social service entities across the United States. For instance, two St. Louis University female graduates are coordinating health education and empowerment workshops in St. Louis and Ferguson cities, Missouri, while leading the effort to implement our RIPPLE program curriculum there.

The organization is currently exploring the possibility to expand international collaborations in some countries including Brazil, India, Jamaica, and Nigeria. With the expertise built from evidence-based practice and local partnerships in numerous local communities in New York City, we bring a unique set of experience and knowledge to effectively train a new generation of young women from diverse backgrounds and regions. The youth who are trained will have a chance not only to learn practical tools to protect themselves, but also to influence their cohorts and communities in a positive manner around the globe.

We also recognize that we have an obligation to those who contribute to and invest in achieving our organization’s goals. We have been successful in bringing results at a lower cost in order to ensure that all funds entrusted to us are effectively used in the pursuit of our mission: create and communicate culturally oriented solutions to the next generation of leaders fighting HIV/AIDS in local communities.

We have witnessed behavioural and attitude changes in the youth that have been enrolled in our programs and how they handle the stigma and other issues related to HIV in a more positive and constructive manner. Most evaluations were conducted qualitatively among participants. We now plan to measure the programs’ effectiveness using a quantitative research method as well (i.e. survey), and conduct a year-long social media campaign called LOVE, UNITY & PASSION to increase HIV/AIDS awareness among young women and girls.

By promoting social innovation, community engagement, and public advocacy, we strive to play a crucial role in the international movement for an AIDS-free generation.
