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Statement submitted by Women’s Division of the General Board of Global Ministries of the United Methodist Church, 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

The Women's Division is the largest denominational faith organization for women in the United States, with 800,000 members involved in advocacy, leadership development, education, service and justice work for women, children and youth. Our advocacy for women's rights includes participation in the 1976-1985 United Nations Decade for Women, Nairobi 1985, Beijing, and in all subsequent meetings of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women. We have worked through partnerships with community organizations in more than 100 countries to implement the Beijing Platform for Action through education, leadership development, economic empowerment, livelihoods, health, migrant rights and violence against women, among others.

The implementation of Beijing Platform for Action must include not only the 12 critical areas of concern but emerging issues. The renewed commitment to the Beijing Platform for Action is a necessary precursor to any post-2015 development agenda.

We also affirm advances made through the Women 2000 Outcome Document (Beijing+5). States recognized that there is not a generic "woman" or "girl" and that factors such as race, class, ethnicity, national status and other identities determine women's choices and their ability to realize rights. We seek to raise the ways that diverse women are impacted due to multiple oppressions and to affect policy that addresses women and girls at the margins. Beijing+5 recognizes the role that macroeconomic policy plays in undermining women's economic and social rights.

We have concerns about the state of women's human rights, especially given issues of global economic inequalities, climate change, increased militarism, resource wars and global migration. We support efforts to accelerate implementation of Millennium Development Goals and define the post-2015 agenda and a set of universal Sustainable Development Goals. This agenda cannot be achieved within current global structures that have concentrated economic power and undermined democracy. Achievements toward women's equality and rights at the local level are wiped away through global economic crisis, rises in fuel or food prices, droughts or storms that destroys crops, or military conflicts that displace millions. Without addressing global and national power imbalances and their causes, efforts to advance women's rights or achieve development targets may become futile.

Poverty

Despite progress, there is a growing gap between the wealthiest and poorest within and between nations caused by a drive for profits over people and nature. Women and girls suffer disproportionately from policies like austerity programs that benefit a few at the expense of critical public services, relying on women's unpaid labour to fill the gaps. The lasting impact of the 2008 global recession, caused by lack of regulations in the U.S. financial sector, has meant loss of homes, health and livelihoods for millions of women.

Food and Agriculture Organization reports that 60 per cent of the world's hungry are women and in many countries women have few legal rights over inheritance, land and property ownership. Women account for two-thirds of the world's 774 million illiterates. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization reports 171 million could be lifted out of poverty through basic

literacy. The poor, disabled, rural, ethnic minorities, elderly and migrants are disproportionately impacted. War, violence and climate change disrupt communities, families, food and water sources and small gains toward institutional access.

Violence against women

Beijing stressed the right of women to be free from violence, yet 20 years later violence has risen. Violence against women is not just perpetrated by individuals but is structural and pervasive, often reinforced by the state through militarism, policing and impunity. The state must promote and protect women's freedom from violence. Women in developing countries report that when one type of violence recedes, another intensifies. Persistent gender discrimination is a root cause of violence. Women in refugee camps or post-conflict reconstruction environments are at particular risk. Women who attempt to escape natural or economic disasters are also in jeopardy. Specific protections are needed for marginalized groups in war, natural disasters, resource grabs and economic crisis, including extremely poor, elderly, rural women, migrant women among others. Dangerous travel from home to temporary displacement sites, virtually non-existent protection within refugee camps, and the distances women travel for firewood and other staples contribute to heightened risks of violence.

Education

Despite the goal set by the Beijing Platform for Action, women and girls continue to lack access to education. For many developing countries gender parity in secondary education remains a distant goal. Lack of education reinforces women's already unequal economic opportunities. Quality education that provides necessary knowledge and skills and leads to decent employment is key for women's advancement in society and socioeconomic development. School safety remains a challenge. Grass-roots partners from developing countries report girls often do not go or drop out of school because of safety issues. Wars, militarism, resource grabs, climate disasters and migration disrupt educational opportunities for girls.

Environment

Extraction of resources, unsustainable production and consumption of goods, and waste have created climate insecurities that affect women's lives and livelihoods, undermining the Beijing Platform for Action and development goals. The escalation of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere must stop if we want to fulfil the Beijing Platform for Action. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change assesses that carbon in the atmosphere has increased by 2.2 per cent per year over the past 10 years. Climate change further impoverishes the already poor by destroying food and water security, creating adverse health and sanitation conditions and often forcing migration. It has a disproportionate effect on communities of colour. Extractive industries, production and waste are often physically located in economically deprived areas where release of environmental toxins in air, land and water undermine women's health, well-being and human rights.

Economic justice

Thirty years of economic globalization have led to unequal trade regimes, vulnerable export-oriented economies, volatile capital flows, lack of labour rights,

regressive tax policies, cuts to social services, growing corporate role in public policy, resource wars, and undermining of the environment. Women face more unsafe work situations, often outside the formal sector, and millions are forced to migrate for work. Undocumented migrant women are often excluded from legal protections and services, including redress from violence or workplace abuse. Vital domestic work and other care duties that women do are generally unpaid or low paid and unaccounted for in national statistics.

Recommendations

- Prioritize and fully implement the Beijing Platform for Action 12 areas of concern and address emerging issues of climate change, migration, resource wars, concentration of corporate power and economic inequality. Focus on state obligations to fulfil women's human rights, including economic, social and cultural rights.
- Promote, defend and protect women and girls' human rights in the face of humanitarian, economic, political and climate crises, recognizing the particular realities of vulnerable groups of women and girls.
- Go beyond minimalist goals of eradicating extreme poverty by tackling structural injustices through effective and equitable macroeconomic, tax and trade policies. Ensure quality education and decent work for women and girls.
- Hold transnational corporations accountable for human rights violations and exploitative practices. Support legal and regulatory mechanisms at all levels.
- Increase women's participation in decision-making at every level of society.
- Acknowledge the key role that women's civil society and grass-roots organizations play in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the Beijing Platform for Action and involve them at all levels.
- States must fully fund United Nations Women and empower it to be a major player in global development policy.
- Engage men and boys to take an active role in gender equality and women's advancement.
- Develop and implement a strong, legally binding climate treaty at the 2015 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and prioritize women's participation in the treaty negotiations. Challenge the role of corporations in climate policymaking, avoid schemes that further privatize and commodify the earth in the name of reducing carbon fuels, and avoid false "energy alternatives" such as "clean coal."
- Promote human rights-based development and Sustainable Development Goals, mandating gender equality and women's human rights in every goal alongside a gender stand-alone goal.

We welcome the opportunity to partner with the United Nations in this Beijing+20 review and in the negotiations on the post-2015 development agenda. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action provides a solid foundation for fulfilment of women's rights across the world and needs to be implemented.