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Statement submitted by Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America, 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 Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America, known as The Episcopal Church, is a Christian denomination of two million members in 17 countries and a member province of the worldwide Anglican Communion. As Christians, we believe that all of humanity is created in God's image and equal before God. Our scriptures, the way of Jesus Christ and our Baptismal Covenant call us to "seek and serve Christ in all persons", regardless of gender.

These values lead us to affirm and uphold the progress made by member states and United Nations agencies in empowering women and girls, through dialogue and international norms and legal instruments, particularly the United Nations Charter, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, Convention on the Rights of the Child, Security Council Resolution 1325, Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Millennium Development Goals. We applaud their implementation by member states and the enhanced protection of human rights for all women and girls.

Episcopalians have accompanied the United Nations in this work since its inception. We have advocated at the United Nations and nationally, adopting programs and policies in our congregations and agencies. Our Church has supported and implemented the Millennium Development Goals since 2000 and they became a mission priority in 2006. We participated in the dialogue leading to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and our decision-making bodies decided in June 2015 to affirm and encourage our ongoing participation in, and financial support of, the new Sustainable Development Goals. We affirm the inclusion of stand-alone Goal 5 on gender equality and the recognition that, ultimately, all seventeen Goals require women's and girls' empowerment to achieve sustainable development for all.

While celebrating these achievements, to ensure truly that "no one is left behind", we ask member states to swiftly adopt and implement legislation on these urgent needs:

Enable women to access power and decision-making positions

We urge member states to increase their efforts to ensure women's representation in decision-making at all levels of society. Major obstacles persist in realizing their leadership in political, commercial and academic realms. Women seeking to access positions of power and decision-making encounter political and financial barriers, insufficient resources for single-family households, unrecognized or undervalued unpaid work contributions to families and society, unaffordable childcare and income inequality between women and men. As a result of ensuing gaps in representation, women cannot effectively represent themselves and their needs, fewer role models emerge to encourage their advancement and they remain dependent on men, affecting their ability to provide for their families and, when necessary, leave violent and abusive relationships.

We ask member states to:

- Continually educate citizens regarding gender discrimination, which diminishes the full dignity of women and girls

- Reduce the gaps in representation by women leaders at all levels and in all sectors, including through the establishment of quotas or direct appointments, which are more effective than elections
- Report national statistics tracking income parity between women and men and close remuneration gaps

Foster women's and girls' economic empowerment and independence

We ask member states to overcome the barriers that prevent women and girls from fully flourishing as individuals and economic contributors to society. Patriarchal cultural practices keep them in the shadows by dictating that girls drop out of school earlier than boys to tend to family members and unpaid domestic work, or else to marry at an early age. Public education is chronically underfunded or expensive, even in developed countries. Lack of access to maternal/paternal leave and child care keep women in positions of caregivers. Access to affordable health care is another challenge. Cultural, religious and societal beliefs may inhibit women's ability to participate in choices related to their bodies, their sexual and reproductive health and their family size. Patriarchal legal and economic systems also place women at a disadvantage, or exclude them, in land and business ownership, financial dealings and contracts. In some areas, resource extraction, such as mining, endangers the health of women and girls and their families.

We urge member states to:

- Facilitate educational policies and awareness campaigns promoting education for women and girls, including leadership training
- Prioritize funding for public education and health care for women and girls
- Require education for men and boys addressing gender discrimination
- Offer incentives to needy families who might otherwise pull girls out of school to attend to unmet domestic needs
- Ban environmental practices negatively affecting the health of women and girls
- Improve access to full sexual and reproductive health provisions, including family planning and disease prevention
- Extend the provision of maternal and parental leave and cap excessive costs of childcare

Eradicate violence against women and girls

We urge member states to persevere in addressing the worldwide epidemic of gender discrimination and gender violence that continues to cripple women, girls, their families and communities. This epidemic is of such proportions that we consider that this year's review theme is critical to successfully realizing the priority theme linking women's empowerment to sustainable development.

Despite advances in raising awareness and national legislation, education is still needed about the prevalence and scope of violence against women and girls, and it must include gender discrimination as a root cause. We also point to the

detrimental influence of the media, advertising, entertainment and fashion industries in promoting or glorifying gender violence through stereotyping and objectification.

We ask member states to:

- Continue to support the United Nations' and civil society's awareness and educational campaigns about gender violence and its prevalence, including root causes such as social and cultural beliefs and sexism
- Increase funding to victim support programs and increase the number of safe houses and shelters
- Step up training to law enforcement personnel on appropriate responses to domestic violence, prosecute perpetrators and ensure effectiveness of restraining orders
- Prioritize responses to human trafficking and continue collaboration with international and national agencies and civil society
- Universally ratify and implement measures related to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and its Optional Protocol
- Study and report on the ways in which media, advertising, entertainment and fashion industries exacerbate violence against women and girls
- Support campaigns to educate and advocate against this culture of violence

Provide preferential treatment to marginalized women and girls

As followers of the Christian way, Episcopalians especially are called to lift up the least, the lost, the marginalized and those too often forgotten. This encompasses many groups of women, but we specifically highlight the needs of women with disabilities; women of colour; women from minority groups based on ethnicity, language, religion, sexual orientation or gender identity; women refugees and immigrants; women and girls displaced by war or sent abroad by themselves; indigenous women; older and aging women; enslaved and trafficked women; women heads of single-family households; rural women and women in developing countries. These groups share in the unfortunate fact that their needs are often unmet or treated as secondary in relation to broader social goals and programs. As a result, they are perpetually disadvantaged, displaced and neglected in their development in proportion to their communities.

We ask member states to:

- Grant preferential financing and resources for programming and financing for resources to meet the needs of these groups
- Ensure speedy and just intervention by law enforcement and the judicial system in communities where domestic violence is particularly pronounced, including but not limited to indigenous, minority, immigrant and poor populations
- Promote cultural awareness and sensitivity training through public education campaigns

- Extend accessibility of health care and affordability of medications for unemployed, poor, elderly and rural women, women with disabilities, undocumented migrants and refugee women
- Invest in distance learning education for women and girls unable to access formal schooling facilities due to distance, disability, or other factors

As Christians, we are called to prophetically witness to unjust systems of oppression, often interlocking, challenge violence and pursue peace and reconciliation. We call upon member states and the United Nations to continue progress under the new Sustainable Development Goals and uphold the values, principles, legislation and implementation of programs for gender justice and gender equality, which ultimately benefit all of humanity.
