



## Economic and Social Council

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### Commission on the Status of Women

Sixty-second session

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

### Statement submitted by Women's Voices Now Inc., 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.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## **Statement**

### **The Unchallenged Obstacle in the Pursuit of Gender Equality**

In the international approach to the pursuit of gender equality that we collectively recognize as a benefit to global society as a whole, there remains a glaring, missing component. That being, a complementary, concerted strategy to challenge the more abstract, toxic paradigms perpetuating gender inequality, namely, “cultures”, “attitudes”, “conventions”, and “perceptions” of women not being equal to men. Overcoming these psychological obstacles requires a shift in consciousness and the changing of hearts and minds.

The media formulates public opinion and strengthens society, protects public interest and watchdogs against corruption. Yet, women’s point of view is proportionally under-published and under-broadcasted compared to men. In politics, the debate over and development of policies — some of which specifically seek to control women’s bodies and reproductive practices — occur where the majority of the decision makers are men. According to the 2015 United Nations Report of “Women in the World,” in commerce, women are fewer in number and, thus, the management of the world’s wealth, the distribution of goods and services, and the decisions regarding ethics of the workplace and family policies transpire without leadership who are empathetic to the unique lifecycle of women. The Report also determined that, regarding access to education, globally, women are still more unlikely to pursue secondary and tertiary education due to societal expectations and/or circumstances stemming from their gender. Before the law where the pursuit of justice happens, from university campuses to countries where women’s testimony counts as a fraction of men’s, verdicts that are effectively ruling on the global epidemic of violence against women punishes and shames the victim, while seeking to mitigate the crime and punishment of the perpetrator. Overall then, the status of women remains denigrated despite rightly celebrated advances.

### **Recognizing Progress**

According to the United Nations Women Annual Report 2016-17, empowered women are achieving visible progress throughout the world. Increasing access to education means women are marrying later and having fewer children. Although a current hot button issue, overall, child marriage is slightly on the decline. Women are enjoying greater economic independence. With an estimated control of 70 percent of global consumer spending, women increasingly influence market preferences and create more opportunity for global economic growth. Although still an epidemic in some countries, reproductive health and maternal mortality has improved considerably over the last two decades, and family-friendly leave policies are on the rise. This is good news. Societies where the status of women is improved and improving translates into the development of powerful and effective communities that will benefit of all its members.

Moreover, year after year the world’s decision makers invest a greater number of resources into the pursuit of women’s rights as human rights in a multitude of ways from legislative reform to promoting grassroots initiatives supporting women’s advancement. Constituting nearly half of the global population, however, women remain underrepresented and misrepresented in media and politics, the very places where influence on society is the greatest. Combined with unequal access to commerce, education, and justice, women are unable to reach their full human potential.

The main obstacles that will continue to persist despite widespread international effort to improve the status of women, however, are: a lack of imagination, a lack of

awareness, and a lack of connection. Every day, women all over the world are defying gender stereotypes in their homes and communities by standing against harmful cultural practices, pursuing work outside of the home, and representing constituencies in political office, to name just a few examples. But these changes have not yet reached a critical mass. In order to multiply these advances, it is important that men and women are aware of changes in the rights and roles of women and to understand that they can happen anywhere and to any society. And, furthermore, that the overall impact of women's advancement is to the benefit of all members of that society.

### **The Missing Key: Media's Power to Change Attitudes and Advance Women**

In an increasingly digital age, Women's Voices Now Inc. celebrates and transmits the unparalleled social impact tool of cinema in a variety of innovative and educational ways to audiences around the world for the express purpose of advocating women's political, social, economic, cultural, and gender rights. In doing so, we witness the shift of attitudes that keep women from advancing to their full potential, both on the part of women and men, and therefore know it is possible. But the work is far from complete and requires more resources, more recognition, and more action on the part of global leaders, governments, and civil societies.

In 2003 the 47th Commission on the Status of Women published agreed conclusions recognizing the influence and potential of media, information and communication technologies (ICT) to advance women throughout the world.

Women's Voices Now Inc. therefore recommends that the world's leaders, governments, and nongovernmental organizations begin a conversation that leads to coordinated and collaborative action on the following recommendations inspired by the 47th Commission on the Status of Women:

- Establish thought partnerships to formulate gender-sensitive guidelines and self-regulatory gender-sensitive guidelines for media coverage and representation, public and community media to work in support of gender equality, endowed with the financial resources and other support necessary to carry out the work.
- Develop media content and programs that accommodate the needs of poor and, in particular, illiterate women, that will help women and men to overcome "thought" barriers (i.e. the fear of change destabilizing the community) to women's empowerment.
- Formulate sincere and effective measures to honour freedom of expression and to promote the freedom of creative expression that is so easily conveyed on a large scale via media outlets and stands to impact a critical mass.
- Combat the growing sexualization and use of pornography in media content; encourage the media to refrain from presenting women as inferior beings and exploiting them as sexual objects and commodities; combat ICT- and media-based violence against women, including criminal misuse of ICT for sexual harassment, sexual exploitation and trafficking in women and girls.
- Support the development and use of ICT as a resource for the empowerment of women and girls, including those affected by violence, abuse and other forms of sexual exploitation.
- Respect the value of different and local languages and promote and encourage local knowledge systems and locally produced content in media and communications, support the development of a wide range of ICT-based programs in local languages, as appropriate, with content relevant to different groups of women, and build the capacity of girls and women to develop ICT content.

- Strengthen and encourage the use of existing information and communication technologies, including radio, television, telecommunications and print, to enhance the use of new technologies for gender equality and the economic, political and social empowerment of women as leaders, participants and consumers and recognize that women and girls are potentially large-scale consumers, users and producers of ICT and media.
  - Provide adequate and appropriate resources for innovative, affordable, accessible and sustainable media and ICT programs, projects and products that support gender equality and gender mainstreaming, and provide support to women's online communities and networks that promote gender equality.
  - Prioritize the allocation of resources to support programs, projects and strategies that aim at increasing women's participation in all realms — educational, political, economic, and social.
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