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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”: implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS

Statement submitted by International Council of Women, International Federation of Business and Professional Women, International Federation of University Women and Soroptimist International, non-governmental organizations 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.

* E/CN.6/2009/1.



Statement*

The member organisations of Project Five-O : International Federation of Business and Professional Women, International Council of Women, International Federation of University Women and Soroptimist International, all hold consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations and applaud the choice of the Priority Theme for the fifty third session of the Commission on the Status of Women “The equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including care giving in the context of HIV/AIDS.” With 60 million men, women and children infected by HIV/AIDS over the past 25 years and close to 25 million deaths as a result, it is a timely focus for the international community.

Since 1980, the Project Five-O Partnership has provided vocational training, education and employment opportunities for thousands of women and girls in developing countries and the countries in transition. Through locally based programmes, funded by Project Five-O, women and girls of all ages have acquired the skills necessary for their economic security and personal development. They have gained the confidence to enter more fully into the activities of their communities, thus influencing the decisions that affect their lives and the well being of their families. Building the capacity of women within their communities has been at the heart of Project Five-O’s mission and all the organisations take pride in this long term and on-going commitment. The Five-O partnership prepares and supports advocacy initiatives locally, nationally and internationally that make a positive difference to the lives of women and their families. In addition, members within their own organisations carry out their programmes in awareness raising, advocacy and action in order to advance the status of women.

Many of the women helped by Project Five-O have had to take on the responsibility of heads of households, becoming the bread winners, the carers of the sick and the mothers of the orphans when often ill equipped themselves to take on these tasks. Project Five-O programmes provide the training and support to enable the women and girls to meet these challenges. Project Five-O believes strongly in the empowerment of women and girls through education and training, enabling them to have better employment opportunities and to make informed decisions about the number and spacing of children and their own sexual health. Of great concern to us is the practice in many developing countries of families removing their girl children from education in order to be the carer of family members living with HIV/AIDS.

But Project Five-O applauds the fact that year on year, girls in greater numbers are now in primary education in developing countries and Project Five-O urges their national Governments to renew their efforts to make secondary education accessible for all girls.

Project Five-O is keenly aware of the vulnerability of women and girls in the global AIDS pandemic and the fact that poverty, underdevelopment and lack of education contribute to the problem which, in some societies, is worsened by armed conflict, natural and man-made disasters, gender inequality and violation of human rights. Project Five-O supports without reservation the 2001 United Nations General Assembly Special Session on HIV/AIDS Declaration of Commitment, which outlined measures to be taken at national, regional and global levels to curb the spread of AIDS and reduce its

* Issued without formal editing.

impact on society. Progress on meeting the demands of the Declaration of Commitment was reviewed at the High Level Meeting on AIDS in 2008. Reports reveal that women sufferers now outnumber men and of all the new cases, 40% are between the ages of 15 and 25 years and the majority of those are women. Of great concern to Project Five-O is the impact of these figures on family life and the development of communities where women are the mainstay, the carers and increasingly, the breadwinners of families.

The Project Five-O Partnership is heartened by the progress that has been made towards achieving the Millennium Development Goal 6, to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS by 2015. But the fact still remains that with every two cases with access to appropriate drugs, five new cases are diagnosed.

Project Five-O would like to see the prevention of infection being given a higher priority with more resources being made available for community-based health education for women and girls, men and boys. This would make it possible for them to take responsibility for their own and each other's well being and to develop good nurturing and caring skills within families. In a pandemic that affects every country and has infected nearly 60 million women, men and children, the international community needs to take more positive action in the prevention and early diagnosis of HIV/AIDS. Worldwide it is one of the leading causes of death and is the main cause of death in sub-Saharan Africa. Its effect on the economic development and sustainability of communities is incalculable.

Project Five-O asks the international community, through its Governments, to intensify its efforts:

- to promote research and education as the means of preventing HIV/AIDS;
- to encourage the manufacture and use of microbicidal products giving women greater control over their sexual health and reducing the risk of infection;
- to find and make available low cost, effective tools for early diagnosis;
- to develop better access to health care and antiretroviral therapies;
- to develop and increase the scope of Prevention of Mother – to – Child Transmission Treatment;
- to treat with some urgency the need to increase the number of trained health workers to work with and support families and communities affected by and living with HIV/AIDS.

Initially the international community failed to respond adequately to the plight of children living with HIV/AIDS and/or orphaned by HIV/AIDS. But by the end of 2007, 24 countries, including 21 in sub-Saharan Africa, had drawn up national plans of action to meet the physical and emotional needs of these children. Policies covering their needs have also been written into national development plans of ministries with responsibility for economic development, health and education. Project Five-O welcomes these advances as indicators of a heightened international awareness of the problems and a greater willingness to find solutions.

Project Five-O welcomes the note of confidence within the 2008 Report on Progress Towards the Millennium Development Goals but Project Five-O is concerned that, in the current economic global climate, some of the advances that have been made will start to unravel because of a reduction in

commitment and resources. With an \$8 million shortfall in funding for HIV/AIDS in 2007, this work is already under threat. A worldwide economic slowdown diminishes the income of the poor, pushing more families into poverty. Some advances of course cannot be undone. Debt once cancelled cannot be re-instated; primary education completed cannot be taken away; protection through immunisation cannot be withdrawn. The problems facing many Governments at this time must not detract from the long term efforts of the international community to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

Project Five-O urges national Governments to remain focussed on breaking the circle of poverty by encouraging initiatives that empower and enlighten women through education and vocational training that enable families to thrive and sustainable communities to develop. Gender equality that recognizes, respects and values the traditional caring role of women is essential to developing shared responsibility within families and communities. Gains already made in establishing such gender equality will be eroded away if the political will of member nations and financial resources are not maintained.

Project Five-O views the Priority Theme of the fifty-third session of the Commission on the Status of Women as an opportunity for us to explore the complexities of sharing responsibilities between men and women, within families, in communities and between civil society and Governments. And as a group of non-governmental organisations used to working together and sharing responsibility, Project Five-O is eagerly looking forward to participating in the debate.

The Review Theme for the fifty-third session: equal participation of women and men in decision making processes at all levels complements the Priority Theme admirably, recognising, as it does, how vital it is to bring women and men together to take responsibility for the decisions that affect them, their families and their communities. Project Five-O awaits the outcome of the discussions around the Review Theme with great interest. At this fifty-third session of the Commission on the Status of Women, Project Five-O is looking for evidence of progress made towards the full participation of women in the decision making forum and urges Member States to hold fast to the words of Kofi Annan at the forty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women in 2005 that “There is no tool for development more effective than the empowerment of women”.
