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Statement submitted by Canadian Federation of University Women, Federation of American Women’s Clubs Overseas (FAWCO), Graduate Women International (GWI), International Alliance of Women, International Council of Women, International Federation for Home Economics, International Federation on Ageing, Make Mothers Matter, Soroptimist International, and Women Graduates – USA Inc., 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.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Graduate Women International presents the following written statement to the sixty-fourth session of the Commission on the Status of Women addressing progress made towards the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

The rate of progress towards implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, agreed upon by 189 Member States in 1995 to “take all necessary measures to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and the girl child” is advancing significantly slower than anticipated.

Graduate Women International suggests that due to lacklustre commitment by States, the interconnectedness between political will and allocation of funding is disregarded. Graduate Women International urges States to use this 25-year benchmark as an opportunity to raise their level of ambition towards action on the realization of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. And, also to take note of the recommendations from subject-expert non-governmental organizations, many of whom have been advocating for the same gender equality issues for more than 25 years.

For 100 years, Graduate Women International has been advocating for women’s and girls’ rights to education. This century-long advocacy work, together with its national federations and associations, and in collaboration with non-government organizations and stakeholders in countries around the world, has contributed to more women and girls than ever having access to traditional education and non-traditional training. Noting this progress, Graduate Women International underscores that these achievements are continuously under jeopardy. Women and girls of all ages continue to face unprecedented challenges to education, with new threats such as digital illiteracy and cyberbullying, climate change, the rise of violent extremism, and the increased number of refugees looming.

Optimistically, since the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, Graduate Women International has adopted 110 resolutions to raise awareness about the barriers to education that women and girls face. These resolutions address gender-based violence, harmful cultural practices, human trafficking, human rights of refugees, education for indigenous women, and the effect of globalization on women and girls. They promote women in leadership, women in peace processes and health education, girls in science, and financial and digital literacy.

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action established that education is a human right and an essential tool for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals of equality, development, and peace. Graduate Women International declares that the basic literacy and numeracy skills developed in primary school are insufficient to equip girls with the knowledge and skills they need to realize their full potential in a rapidly changing world. Consequently, Graduate Women International advocates for four types of post-primary education: secondary; tertiary; continuing; and non-traditional education.

Post-primary education gives girls and young women the academic and personal tools that are vital to progressing further in higher education, work, and society; equips them with high-level academic knowledge and qualifications; enables the uptake of professional positions and increases earning potential; improves personal development; and is both a means of empowerment and an investment in tomorrow’s future leaders and decision-makers.

Graduate Women International calls on States and education sectors to take collective responsibility to:

- Ensure that cultural and traditional practices such as female genital mutilation, menstrual hygiene taboos, and harmful practices against widows do not detract from women's and girls' right to access post-primary education
- Increase protection for victims of violence and culture practices by adopting and enforcing national legislation
- Commit to female teacher recruitment and training to meet an imminent global shortfall; appropriately train teachers for indigenous people, language minorities, people with functional impairment, and other vulnerable groups
- Ensure access to post-primary education in those sectors of society where women and girls are marginalized through natural disaster, war, migration, and post-conflict dislocation
- Include reporting procedures for gender-based violence, including reporting procedures for such violence experienced on school premises or while travelling to or from school
- Enhance science, technology, engineering, and mathematics education for girls
- Align commitments with the Sustainable Development Goals

The girl child, a particular focus of many women's organizations, is one of the 12 critical areas of concern in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Available indicators therein show that the girl child is discriminated against from the earliest stages of life, through her childhood, and into adulthood. Subsequently, Graduate Women International adopted two resolutions (2013 and 2016, respectively) to raise awareness about the negative impacts on girls' education, of early and forced child marriage, and ritual abuse. As related to the girl child, sponsors of this statement urge States to collaborate with non-government organization experts to achieve:

- 100 per cent ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols
- Worldwide implementation of other international treaties concerning the girl child
- Complete elimination of harmful cultural and social norms and practices against girls
- Full realization of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women General Recommendation No. 36 on the right of girls and women to education

Graduate Women International also remains deeply concerned about gender-based violence and underscores that violence destabilizes the safety, dignity, health, and human rights of millions of women and girls of all ages. The first action towards eliminating gender-based violence is to draw attention to the frequency of its incidents and spread awareness about the issue, as well as view organizations as agents of change towards the elimination of the violence, locally and globally. Graduate Women International believes that as a civilization, we are at a critical moment in time when we must acknowledge, once and for all, that the safety and security of women and girls is the foundation of a sustainable society. We call on all men, women and States to:

- Strenuously reject all notions that justify gender-based violence
- Punish violence perpetrators to the full extent of the law
- Enact strict laws where there are none

Gender-based harassment, sometimes leading to violence in the world of work, is one of the most critical and widespread obstacles to women's economic empowerment, autonomy, independence, and realization of gender equality. As an organization committed to the empowerment of all women and girls, Graduate Women International calls for the urgent establishment of much-needed internationally-agreed laws and regulations tackling the many different forms of gender-based violence in the workplace.

To this point, Graduate Women International is encouraged by the standard-setting International Labour Organization's 2019 Violence and Harassment Convention and Recommendation No. 206.

Violence against women is particularly apparent in armed conflict situations. To this end, Graduate Women International has adopted 15 resolutions during the past 25 years to address the issue, such as calling for the elimination of child soldiers and protection of women and girls in conflict areas. Alternately, women are underrepresented in peace processes. However, when women are involved, the likelihood that a peace agreement will last longer than 15 years increases by up to 35 per cent according to the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women).

In addition to the aforementioned recommendations, Graduate Women International and the statement co-signers urge States to:

- Invest in financial literacy training for women at a young age
- Collaborate with all stakeholders and contribute their full support for a more significant impact toward eliminating gender-based violence
- Increase women's participation in conflict resolution at decision-making levels; promote women's contribution to fostering a culture of peace
- Challenge established barriers to women's economic empowerment and participation in positions of leadership and decision-making
- Adopt institutional mechanisms at all levels to guide women's and girls' advancement and include women in policy and decision-making processes

Graduate Women International represents affiliates at the United Nations and participates annually in the Commission on the Status of Women to inform policymakers and stakeholders on issues related to education, gender, and human rights. Headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland, it collaborates with member affiliates in 55 countries, independent members in 16 countries, and non-government organizations who strive for the advancement of women's rights through education and life-long learning. Graduate Women International is committed to the success of the Sustainable Development Goals and implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in collaboration with all stakeholders, governments, academia, and non-government organizations.

The undersigned non-government organizations in consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council are confirmed co-sponsors of this statement:

Canadian Federation of University Women

Federation of American Women's Clubs Overseas (FAWCO)

International Alliance of Women

International Council of Women

International Federation on Ageing

International Federation for Home Economics

Make Mothers Matter

Soroptimist International

Women Graduates-USA, Inc.
