

STATEMENT TO THE 58TH SESSION OF THE SUB-COMMISSION  
ON THE PROMOTION AND PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

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**ITEM 6 – OTHER HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES**

**(a) Women's Human Rights**

Mr. President,

This is a joint statement of the following organizations who are members of the NGO Committee on the Status of Women of the Conference of Non-governmental Organizations in Consultative Relations with the UN (CONGO): International Federation of University Women, International Business and Professional Women, -----.

Women's rights to equal opportunity and treatment are neither a luxury nor a favour but basic to the process of democratization and social justice. They are equally an economic imperative. While we have made undeniable advances in giving attention to the promotion of women at the national and international levels, it needs to be universally understood and accepted that without their participation in decision making in all spheres of life and at all levels of society, we cannot eradicate poverty, we cannot create fully democratic societies and we cannot formulate economic and financial policies which promote social justice and economic justice for all. Without women's participation at the negotiation table, we cannot have world peace and security.

Permit me to elaborate these assertions with some illustrations:

***1. Eradication of Poverty:***

On this first point, research results indicate that one-third of the world's households is headed by a woman. As a direct consequence of women's disadvantaged situation with regard to education, employment, inheritance rights or land tenure and the various ways of discrimination and exclusion they experience in their daily lives, most of these households belong to the poorest segments of societies. Children from these households, because they receive little or no education, run the greatest risk of becoming child workers and later perpetuate the vicious cycle of poverty and exclusion. Neglect of women's access to lifelong education and training and to productive assets and credit not only deprive women and their families of income but also reduce the skill level of a nation's human resources, limit national production and bar countries from being competitive in the global market.

***2. Creating Fully Democratic Societies***

No society can call itself fully democratic if legislation and entrenched customs and habits prevent women from participating in the shaping of their society's future; if children grow up in the understanding that giving privileges to some and limiting the rights of others is permissible. Democracy is a self-generating condition. It is not static but its existence requires constant vigilance which has to permeate all social, political and economic spheres. As half of the population, women's condition can therefore hinder or enhance the democratization process and could be regarded as an indicator of the level of democracy.

For example, it is a well-known fact that women in Latin America have participated in massive numbers in the struggles and movement for democracy in the continent. In these struggles their participation differed in significant ways from earlier movements for social change particularly in the new awareness of the need to struggle for women's rights simultaneously with the struggle for democracy. Through this participation at grassroots and all other levels, women are no longer calling only for political parties to take up women's issues; they are calling for a transformation of society and for politics in which the inclusion of women and their perspectives is indispensable.

### ***3. Formulating Economic and Financial Policies which Promote Social Justice and Human Prosperity.***

The limited access of women to decision-making at local, community, national and international levels determine also the development of political, economic and financial policies. Societies cultivate and inculcate sets of values in women and men differently, generally assigning women to where they are absent from shaping important policies. Yet, if we advocate for human beings to be at the center of development; if we want to share the benefits of globalization and if we demand that social justice be a reality, we have to promote the valuation of caring, protecting and nurturing which women have been accustomed to performing. We have to inject a new system of values which has the ability to perceive the needs of others; we have to foster the right-brain "feminine energy" which has the ability to apply a human face and spirit to the legal tenets of human rights.

### ***4. World Peace is a Woman's Movement***

Many of you in the Sub-Commission know that the peace movement in recent history can be traced back to the women, who, in the 1820s and 1830s in the U.S. and in England, formed women's peace societies. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, women active in the movement for women's suffrage and in other movements for social change were simultaneously active in working to promote peace. In 1905 the first Nobel Peace Prize was received by a women, Bertha von Suttner of Austria, who took an anti-war stance and promoted non-violence and international sisterhood. Many women's groups like the IFUW, were created also with peace as its primary goal. In the history of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), it recounts: "These intelligent and sensitive women first came together in World War I from neutral countries and countries whose men were slaughtering each other in the battlefield, yet the women warmly embraced as sisters. The symbolism of the moment must never be lost, for the surmounting of artificial barriers in the spirit of reconciliation is the most essential message and the most needed attribute for our time."

Today, the women's peace movement has raised major issues on war, peace, armaments and militarism around the world and there is no denying that the movement has been able to accomplish significant inroads in impacting public opinion. The big question remains however, on how much women can realistically achieve for peace for as long as they do not participate in governmental and intergovernmental bodies that make decisions about war and peace, military spending and policy?

Thank you Mr. President.

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