

**STATEMENT TO THE 61st SESSION OF THE
COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS
29 March 2005**

**delivered by Conchita Poncini (International
Federation of University Women)**

ITEM 10: Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

Mr. Chairperson,

I am speaking on behalf of the International Federation of University Women, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, Inter-African Committee International Council of Jewish Women, the International Council of Women, Women's International Zionist Organization, Femmes Africa Solidarité, , World Union of Catholic Women's Organizations,

The role of men and boys is indispensable in achieving gender equality in economic, social and cultural rights. The Charter of the United Nations was the first international instrument to recognize women's equal rights with men and has created the impulse in providing a legal codification of these rights in national laws and policies. The World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna provided the solid basis that clearly acknowledged women's rights are human rights and had emphasized the need for governments and the United Nations to make it their priority to ensure full and equal participation of women in political, civil, economic, social and cultural life and the elimination of all forms of discrimination on grounds of sex. Commitment to gender equality and women's rights to sustainable economic and social development are contained in recent world conferences and summits. In particular the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action adopted at the Fourth World Conference of Women in 1995, has become the blueprint of a framework for translating into concrete actions, the provisions and positive forces of human rights law for women,.

Mr. Chairperson

A political declaration was signed by consensus on 4 March this year at the 49th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women, which reaffirms government commitment to the Beijing Platform for Action. Stipulated in Paragraph 25 of the Platform is to "Encourage men to participate fully in all actions towards equality." This should be considered in the light of Paragraph 1, which emphasizes the principle of shared power and responsibility between women and men at home, in the workplace and in the wider national and international communities.

Mr. Chairperson,

This August Body has at its disposal comprehensive international principles, instruments, norms, guidelines and processes, that governments commit to fully implement and fulfil the goals of gender equality. Yet the world is far from achieving this. Our lives continue to be principally dominated by an economic model that prioritizes men as "breadwinners"; institutions and national legislations hardly address gender imbalances in economic, social and cultural resources..

Culture and religion are entrenched in behavioral patterns and mental attitudes, exacerbated by stereotyping the economic and social roles of women and men and creating a vicious cycle of multiple discriminatory practices favouring a patriarchal form of society. One such practice is the deprivation of women's rights to reproductive health, education and ownership of land, housing, property and inheritance rights.. Such deprivation of rights to assets are added obstacles that exacerbate women's situation of economic, social and cultural dependency.

Current policies are reinforcing unfavourable bias towards women in employment because they are first to suffer precarity, unemployment and opportunistic retrenchment practices. The undervaluing and confining of women's work to "female jobs" has also had negative consequences to the income women earn which typically are between 20-30% less than men. Women are also exploited in the burgeoning informal economy which has in turn led to the feminization of poverty.

Balancing work and family life has been the biggest challenge to women in terms of inequalities and forms of discrimination against them. Women are perceived to be incapable of achieving adequate and equal performance in employment.. This stereotype concept is unfounded and obsolete for women are participating longer in economic activities and represent almost 50% of the global labour force. Women continue to work even after childbearing age contributing to family income or as sole breadwinners in singleheaded households or simply exercising their right to personal development. Women are also creating micro enterprises in great numbers, creating jobs for themselves and others.

Mr. Chair,

The challenge today is to shift the role of men towards advancing women's economic, social and cultural rights and promoting gender equality through a better understanding and assessment of gender roles and related structural inequalities. This entails commitment, vigilance and action in promoting men's parenting role and their active involvement in harmonizing and reconciling work and family responsibilities on a shared basis, with a view to relieving the disproportionate burden affecting women's ability to access and retain work and girls being forced to drop out of school; to give increased attention to the role of men in preventing violence against women and HIV/AIDS infection among women and girls, especially given the assymetric power relations and women's subordination and vulnerability to discrimination; to discourage adherence to ideas of inferiority or superiority between sexes brought about by peer pressures, socialization processes and belief systems which perpetuate stereotyping that exacerbate inequalities; Finally, to dismantle the traditional division of labour and provide women equal access to information and communication technologies which, because of language, educational and skills deficits and lack of economic power, have generally excluded women from the information society, trade and entrepreneurship development.

Thank you Mr. Chairperson.
