

DRAFT JOINT STATEMENT ON INCLUSION OF AGENDA ITEM INTEGRATING
WOMEN'S HUMAN RIGHTS AND MAINSTREAMING GENDER EQUALITY
PERSPECTIVES

The architecture for gender equality, protection and promotion of women's rights and improvement of their status in society, have at present been largely designed and virtually completed by various normative instruments, States declarations, platforms for action, to name a few: (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women; the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action; the Cairo ICPD Programme of Action, the Copenhagen Plan of Action and the Millennium Development Goals and the Outcome Document of the Sept. 2005 Summit on UN Reform and the MDGs) Voluntary pledges have also contributed to embellishing this architecture such as the Ministerial Statements of women Foreign and other Ministers on Violence Against Women at the Commission on Human Rights and on Women's Political Empowerment at the Human Rights Council, both initiated by the Foreign Minister of Switzerland, Ms. Micheline Calmy-Rey.

This architecture unfortunately remains virtual. It has yet to become a reality by resolving the following asymmetries, basically through political will of states to implement international normative instruments in their national legislation and policies and more concretely filling the gaps that exist;

In particular:

- ❖ Women compared to men in top leadership and decision-making positions in the political sphere have not yet reached the critical mass of 30% worldwide;
- ❖ In the world of work, the glass ceiling is thick and tough to break, women holding chief executive and management positions are less than 5%;
- ❖ Women in the majority depend largely on men for their housing rights and right to food;
- ❖ A large population of women lack property and inheritance rights and even in many cases have no right to dispose of the very income they earn from products of their own labour, consequently more women than men are at the threshold of the poverty line;
- ❖ Women's unpaid work in the household is unrecognised and unvalued and national statistical satellite accounts (Beijing PFA) have not advanced in valuing this unpaid work which, according to UNIFEM has reached 16 trillion dollars from 11 trillion dollars in 1995. For that matter, there has been no systematic gender and age statistics to provide indicators of gender-based impact of policies and practices;
- ❖ Women's decent work remains precarious and lack safety nets as these jobs held mostly by women are in the informal economy or in part-time jobs
- ❖ violence against women throughout her life course from girlhood to adulthood and ageing is widespread worldwide in harmful traditional practices, cultural relativism, armed conflicts and domestic violence which is usually free from impunity as they occur in the private sphere not covered by public law;
- ❖ While women are the other half (or even more according to UN statistics) of the population that bears the double load of caring for children and other dependent members of the household and earning a living at the same time,

they nevertheless are considered vulnerable, not in the sense of victims of human rights violations, but because of their reproductive role which is generally not considered as a shared responsibility of men and women (Ratification of ILO Convention 156 on Sharing of Work and Family Responsibilities has been low compared to other Conventions);

- ❖ Girls compared to boys remain deprived of their right to education although some progress has been measured at the primary school level;
- ❖ Women's lack of legal knowledge of their rights , including their basic right to their own sexuality, become preys to HIV/AIDS and other sexually communicable diseases and maternal mortality;
- ❖ Prostitution and human trafficking are emerging as forms of forced or bonded slavery where perpetrators remain unpunished;
- ❖ Because women less than men are not educated in science, mathematics and computer science, and also cannot afford to be trained in ICTs, there exists not only the digital divide but also a gender divide;
- ❖ Gender inequality intersects with age, race, ethnicity, that is, women are doubly discriminated against because of their sex and these other factors.

With the enumeration of the above gender imbalances, we are confident that the Commission on the Status of Women and the Human Rights Council need no further convincing of the imperative need to keep in the agenda on a sustainable basis, the integration of women's rights and mainstreaming gender equality throughout the UN system and everywhere. But taking gender equality seriously implies strengthening the competence and responsibility of the special procedures, treaty bodies and other mandate holders and stakeholders to ensure that gender equality and women's human rights are dealt with within the context of economic and social development, environment, conflict prevention, resolution and reconciliation, peace-keeping, human security and humanitarian assistance. It is also critical for the Office of the High Commissioner to provide technical assistance, training of trainers, capacity building and providing empowerment tools to women especially human rights education and legal literacy.

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(ifuw), 19 Sept. 2006