



## Economic and Social Council

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### Commission on the Status of Women

#### Fifty-third session

2-13 March 2009

Item 3 (a) (i) of the provisional agenda\*

**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 the International Federation of University Women, a non-governmental organization 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.

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\* E/CN.6/2009/1.



## **Statement\***

The International Federation of University Women (IFUW) is committed to equal participation of women and men in decision-making at all levels, and welcomes the continued attention the Commission on the Status of Women is giving to this issue under the Review theme for the fifty-third session.

Despite tremendous efforts over time to ensure equality of opportunities for women and men to hold decision-making positions, advancement has been very slow.

The Beijing+ 5 Outcome Document (2000) noted that “women continue to be underrepresented at the legislative, ministerial and sub ministerial as well as at the highest levels of the corporate sector and other economies levels”. The Secretary General of the Inter-Parliamentary Union suggested that the critical mass of 30% in legislative bodies called for in the Beijing Platform for Action will not be reached until 2025, with full parity not achieved until 2048 (CSW fiftieth session). The 2008 Gender Gap Report, published recently by the World Economic Forum, noted that the political gap between men and women has been closed by only 16%, below nearly all other indicator areas.

### **Women in power as leaders and decision-makers**

IFUW recognizes that the search for equality is a search for human rights as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In 2008 women are still very much underrepresented in the political and/or economic fibre of most countries, with the exception of the Nordic countries and Rwanda. This undervaluing of women is serious. According to Klaus Schwab, Founder and Executive Chairman of the World Economic Forum (WEF) “Greater representation of women in senior leadership positions within governments and financial institutions is vital not only to find solutions to the current economic turmoil, but to stave off such crises in future.”

It is not for a lack of potential that the situation of under-representation exists in the political arena. It is generally agreed that elected/appointed women assist in making legislative bodies appear fairer to the populace, more pro-social justice and more democratic. Research also indicates that an assembly with a significant number of women representatives is more aware of legislation that affects women. This includes allocation of resources, promotion of gender budgeting, development of poverty reduction strategies, promotion of gender equality in areas such as capacity building, human rights and freedom from violence. Reaching Millennium Development Goal 3 – *Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women* is thus very important for progress in the other Millennium Goals.

Women’s groups worldwide are engaged in educating and sensitizing others about the advantages of legislative bodies with more women representatives, but Governments should and can do much more by encouraging gender equality and enshrining the concept in their own policies. Governments also control what is taught in the schools and it is imperative that principles of equality be recognized and taught in primary classes onwards, coupled with courses in leadership development for all ages.

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\* Issued without formal editing.

Not to be forgotten is how difficult it is for many girls in the world to obtain an education. Many are deprived of the opportunity to attend school either because of societal attitudes or because they are too poor to attend. Thus, they are denied opportunities to learn essential leadership skills that would enable them to move easily and confidently into decision-making positions at home, in the community or in government. Increasing access to schooling as well as the literacy capabilities of adult women in many countries should have higher priority.

We would point out that institutions of higher education have failed to set an example in the promotion of women staff in their institutions and this affects the leadership and role model pool at this level.

Lack of financial assistance is one of the greatest hindrances to women's advancement to positions of political power. As a member of the African Campaign for Education for All pointed out at the 8th Civicus World Assembly held earlier this year, "Civil society can only advocate and propose. It is up to the governments to implement....We need resources to help women campaign and participate in politics on an equal playing field with men."

### **Gender Equality Architecture**

Within the United Nations system, the right to equality of opportunity has been slow to materialize. One outcome of this lack of progress is that women's groups worldwide are advocating for instituting the concept of Gender Equality Architecture as part of the structural reorganization of the United Nations system. Long spoken of, it has at last come to the forefront. Its implementation would lead to progressive benefits for women. IFUW supports this effort and urges the United Nations Member States to establish and maintain a high level agency for women headed by a woman Under Secretary General with regular sustainable funding and with resources and a mandate to initiate and operate programmes at the country level. The members of this Commission on the Status of Women assembly have an unparalleled opportunity to support members of the United Nations General Assembly in their efforts to ensure that the design for such an agency is one which gives women, both in and outside the United Nations system, tools for implementation of equality of opportunity in decision-making positions.

### **Women in Decision-making in Finance**

It is also urgent that Governments encourage financial institutions and international bodies to include women in economic decision-making positions. It goes without saying that these same Governments must set an example by making visible their intent to make gender equality in their own government positions an integral part of government policy. Financial institutions, both national and international, must employ women in senior positions, publicize this fact, and consider providing and promoting the decent work concept, as stated in the International Labour Organization initiative. They must promote a gender perspective in the labour market by the use of data disaggregated by sex and age.

Significant gaps in decent work opportunities lead to ghettoization of women in low paying, non benefit jobs. The World Economic Forum has warned that "In the current economic environment there is a danger that economic investment in gender equality along with other challenges, may fall."

Global instability and financial crises have a disproportionately negative impact on women. As women account for 50% of “human talent” in the world, it makes the most sense to optimize this talent in regards to international trade agreements by requiring equal treatment of women and men in the workforce everywhere and provision of equal opportunities for job advancement through training education and promotion.

The Commission on the Status of Women Outcome document of 2006 proposed very pertinent actions; these bear reading again. The words *establish, ensure, take measures to, develop strategies for, adopt, recognize, remove, modify, and strengthen* are repeated frequently. How long will it be before nations take courage and collectively accept a woman’s worth, counting her as an equal partner? Continuing to marginalize half its population will never bring about lasting positive outcomes to any country.

The fifty-third session of the Commission on the Status of Women provides the opportunity to review progress made, to note impediments to progress and to develop firm plans to ensure that women attain equality of opportunity in leadership and decision making.

**Summary of recommendations:**

1. Publicly acknowledge and use existing and new recommendations to remove all impediments to achieving equality of men and women in power as leaders and decision-makers at all levels
2. Increase opportunities for schooling for girls and promote widely the integration of leadership skills within the curriculum
3. Acknowledge that it is crucial that international and national financial bodies include men and women in high positions
4. Support with vigour the processes for establishing a Gender Equality Architecture within the United Nations system
5. Acknowledge women’s commitment to diversity, pluralism and democracy and their unique abilities to move society forward.