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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

**Joint written statement* submitted by Women's Federation
for World Peace International, Soroptimist International,
Universal Peace Federation, non-governmental organizations
in general consultative status, National Alliance of Women's
Organizations, Widows Rights International, non-
governmental organizations in special consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[30 May 2023]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.

Policy Review and Recommendations for Women's Rights in ASEAN and EU

Statement submitted by Women's Federation for World Peace International, with important input from its Youth Human Rights Internship Program, and co-signed by: Soroptimist and Nobel Laureate, Maureen Maguire in her personal capacity, Universal Peace Federation and Widows Rights International.

ASEAN

We commend the ASEAN member states for their commitment to advancing gender equality and empowering women in the region. The ASEAN Declaration on the Advancement of Women in the ASEAN Area, adopted in 1988, marked a significant milestone in recognizing the importance of women's empowerment and gender equality for regional development objectives.

We acknowledge the progress made in increasing women's workforce participation in countries like the Philippines, where measures such as extended maternity leave and support for flexible work schedules have been implemented. These initiatives have contributed to enhancing economic opportunities for women. However, despite these positive developments, challenges persist regarding women's rights within the ASEAN nations. Instances of discrimination, abuse, and violence against women, including domestic violence, trafficking, and sexual harassment, continue to be prevalent. Additionally, disparities in access to healthcare and education persist, particularly in rural areas. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these difficulties, with women bearing a disproportionate burden, especially in sectors such as tourism and hospitality.

While the ASEAN member states have demonstrated their commitment to advancing gender equality and women's empowerment through initiatives like the ASEAN Women's Economic Empowerment Summit, there is still work to be done. Gender pay disparities, gender-based violence, and barriers to healthcare and education must be addressed comprehensively. We urge the ASEAN member states to strengthen their legal frameworks, ensuring they are inclusive and gender-sensitive, and to enforce laws that prohibit discrimination, domestic violence, and sexual harassment. Furthermore, promoting women's leadership in politics, industry, and civil society will ensure that women's voices are heard and their perspectives considered in decision-making processes.

EUROPEAN UNION

The Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 contributes primarily to the fifth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) on Gender Equality. It aligns with SDG targets related to ending discrimination against women and girls, improving access to leadership opportunities, and implementing systems to track gender equality. It also has some contributions to the tenth SDG on reducing inequalities by addressing gender inequalities at the regional level. Furthermore, the strategy contributes to the sixteenth SDG on building peaceful societies by addressing gender-based violence, promoting access to justice, and strengthening institutions.

However, there are areas for improvement. The strategy could pay more attention to other characteristics of discrimination, such as race, ethnicity, religion. Incorporating these aspects into social media campaigns and initiatives could contribute more broadly to SDG targets. The strategy's focus on the care sector could be further developed to address the complexities of healthcare systems in member states. Additionally, there is a need to ensure that the strategy's goals are met by 2025, avoiding a repetition of familiar objectives in future strategies.

WFWPI believes and commends the Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 which demonstrates a commitment to advancing gender equality in Europe. By addressing

various aspects of gender inequality and promoting women's rights, it aims to create a more equal and inclusive society. The EU Parliament has made a commitment to protect women's rights and promote gender equality. They intend to achieve this by adopting legislation and providing funding to address gender equality issues. Their initiatives include promoting gender equality in the workplace, addressing the gender pay gap, increasing women's representation on company boards, in politics, ICT, and STEAM fields, and protecting women's sexual and reproductive rights.

One particular challenge faced by working women is balancing work and motherhood. A significant number of working mothers choose to reduce their working hours or leave the workforce altogether due to difficulties in achieving work-life balance, high childcare costs, and limited support. In the United States, women's unemployment rates increased by 2.9% more than men's in 2020, according to a study by Indeed. Many women feel compelled to choose between family and work, and they often encounter difficulties reentering the workforce after becoming mothers or taking maternity leave. The same study by Indeed revealed that 70% of women reported a lack of necessary support from management during pregnancy or maternity leave, negatively impacting their professional careers.

Addressing the gender gap in relation to race and religion is another critical aspect of achieving gender equality in the workplace. Despite progress, women still face disparities in terms of pay. On average, women earn about \$0.82 for every \$1 earned by men, according to the most recent Census Bureau data from 2018. While laws like the Equality Act and the EU Equal Treatment Directive have improved employment laws and narrowed the gender gap in Europe and the UK, not all women benefit equally from these laws. Some EU countries have implemented quota laws and other measures to promote inclusion of women on corporate boards, but the same level of emphasis has not been placed on women of color or women of different religious backgrounds, particularly Muslim women.

To address the issues of gender inequality and discrimination against women in various aspects, including the workplace, race, religion, and other areas, WFWPI and partners urges the following recommendations can be made to the Human Rights Council:

1. **Strengthen Legal Frameworks:** Encourage member states to strengthen their legal frameworks by enacting comprehensive legislation that explicitly prohibits gender-based discrimination in all areas of life, including employment, education, and public services. This should include provisions to protect the rights of women from diverse racial and religious backgrounds.
2. **Promote Gender Equality in the Workplace:** Advocate for measures to promote gender equality in the workplace, such as implementing gender quotas for corporate boards and leadership positions. Encourage member states to provide incentives and support for companies that actively promote diversity and inclusion, including the advancement of women from all backgrounds.
3. **Improve Work-Life Balance:** Advocate for policies that support work-life balance, including affordable and accessible childcare services, parental leave, flexible work arrangements, and support for working mothers. Encourage member states to invest in social infrastructure to facilitate the integration of work and family responsibilities.
4. **Combat Intersectional Discrimination:** Recognize and address the intersectional nature of discrimination faced by women, particularly those from racial and religious minorities. Member states should ensure that anti-discrimination laws and policies are inclusive and consider the specific challenges faced by women of different races, religions, and ethnicities.

5. **Raise Awareness and Education:** Promote awareness campaigns and educational programs to challenge gender stereotypes, promote gender equality, and foster inclusivity in schools, workplaces, and communities. Member states should invest in comprehensive sex education programs that emphasize gender equality and respect for diversity.

6. **Ensure Access to Justice:** Ensure that victims of gender-based discrimination, including women from diverse backgrounds, have access to effective and accessible justice mechanisms. Member states should establish specialized courts or tribunals to handle cases of discrimination and provide legal aid and support services for victims.

7. **Enhance Data Collection:** Advocate for improved data collection and disaggregation to capture the experiences of women from diverse racial, religious, and ethnic backgrounds. Member states should collect and analyze data on the representation and experiences of women in various sectors to identify disparities and develop targeted policies and interventions.

8. **Strengthen International Cooperation:** Encourage international cooperation and collaboration to share best practices, experiences, and lessons learned in promoting gender equality and combating discrimination against women. Member states should actively participate in relevant international forums and support initiatives aimed at advancing women's rights globally.

9. **Support Civil Society Organizations:** Provide support and protection for civil society organizations that work to promote gender equality, women's rights, and non-discrimination. Member states should create an enabling environment for these organizations to operate freely and contribute to the advancement of women's rights.

10. **Monitor and Evaluate Progress:** Establish robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess the progress made in promoting gender equality and combating discrimination against women. Regular reporting should be encouraged, and member states should be held accountable for their commitments to women's rights and gender equality.

By implementing these recommendations, the Human Rights Council can contribute to creating a more inclusive and equal society for women, irrespective of their race, religion, or background.
