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Statement submitted by Asia Pacific Women’s Watch (APWW), 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.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Asia Pacific Women's Watch is a large voluntary activism network based in the Asia and Pacific Region. Our members are grass roots, national and regional organisations who work within a Human Rights Framework for the advancement of women in all their diversity. We are represented throughout the five sub-regions of Central Asia, East Asia, The Pacific, South Asia and South-East Asia and work actively with other major regional and international women's networks. Our work connects with the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPFA), International Convention for the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Global Acceleration Plan 2026 (Generation Equality), The Paris Climate Agreements, United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 and other following Women, Peace and Security Resolutions. Asia Pacific Women's Watch recognises and supports the outcomes from Conference of Parties 27th session and the plans to address climate justice through adaptation and loss and damage actions. Gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls are prerequisites to the realisation of the Beijing Platform for Action, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and other international commitments.

Gender inequality is a major cause and effect of hunger and poverty; it is estimated that 60 per cent of chronically hungry people are women and girls. We are concerned at the slow progress to implement concrete actions and accountability to achieve gender equality across our region. There is clear global and local backlash against human rights and dignity, justice and women's human rights and those who work on women's rights. We have observed a profound shift in the current social, economic and climate landscape. We are witnessing a shrinking space for women to express their opinion or ideas in public, in the mainstream media and social media. Women human rights defenders and journalists and women's rights organisations face threats, intimidation, arrest and in some cases death.

The push back of Women's Rights and the slow commitments by governments to implement their promises to global commitments is growing and we demand that governments go beyond rhetoric to reality and work on real transformation for women on the ground. There is an urgent need to accelerate progress on gender equality and a dire need to address the multidimensionality of the current crises and this needs urgent, efficient and sustainable redress of systemic and structural barriers, including asymmetrical power relations, inequalities of wealth, power and resources, unjust trade and investment agreements, militarism and conflict patriarchal authoritarianism and marginalising governance.

Efforts to achieve gender equality by 2030 are severely lacking with only 13 per cent of countries have either met or almost met the target; 24 per cent close to target; 34 per cent moderate to target; 15 per cent far from target and 13 per cent very far from target. Resources required for acceleration are not available or severely depleting. Preliminary figures from Official Development Assistance (ODA) reveal significant redirection of assistance across Development Assistance Committee (DAC) members towards humanitarian response, reconstruction and refugee costs around the war in Ukraine, and away from developing countries. Any work on women's rights and gender equality must operate across humanitarian, disaster, development and peace contexts.

Despite normative and developmental frameworks to advance gender equality over the last 25 years, and national and regional Gender Equality Plans and Declarations, women in all their diversity remain the main face of poverty in the Asia and Pacific Region. If this continue, over 340 million women and girls, an estimated 8 per cent of the world's female population, will live in extreme poverty by 2030, and

close to one in four will experience moderate or severe food insecurity. The rate of violence against women is increasing and the gender gap in power and leadership positions remains entrenched, and, at the current rate of progress, the next generation of women will still spend on average 2.3 more hours per day on unpaid care and domestic work than men.

Making progress on gender equality and empowerment of women and girls as envisaged by the International Conventions, the Beijing Platform for Action, the 2030 Agenda and the Global Acceleration Plan 2026 require increased public, private and Official Development Assistance financing and transformative financing as per the aspiration of the Agenda 2030. Gender responsive and transformative financing for Gender Equality is required urgently and current funding should not perpetuate inequality and discrimination, including funding and resourcing of autonomous feminist organisations and networks to mobilise and organise.

Gender Based Violence and Violence Against Women and Girls is rising. Pacific women and girls experience twice the global average rates of Gender Based Violence and indigenous women and girls, and women and girls with disabilities across all communities experience much higher rates of violence than others in their national contexts. This gross human rights violation wielded by individuals, communities, states, laws and institutions must end. Gender-based violence has damaging impacts on survivors, families, communities and societies. It is entrenched in patriarchal power and control, over the past decades there has been a stark depoliticization in making visible how violence against women had been used as a tool to exercise power to uphold male dominance, patriarchy and keep women insubordinate in all spheres of society, including social, economic, political and cultural spheres. We need to remove barriers to participation and decision-making to enable real transformative change to occur.

We must repoliticise the work on violence against women. Governments must see National Action Plans as a minimum standard not the normative standard. We need to see a political ideology and an agenda that seeks to reinvent, redefine, clarify, understand, question power, dismantle oppressive systems and structures and reframe narratives for conceptual clarity; in the efforts to sustain, strengthen and revitalize the movement to truly end violence against women and girls. To enable this shift there is a need to provide a mechanism to work in solidarity with civil society and women's rights actors, indigenous and disability actors who know what their community needs, what their aspirations are and what it will take to resource this.

The lack of diverse women in key decision-making positions produces and prolongs a climate which disadvantages women in all their diversity. Threats of violence; social and community exclusion; insults based on appearance, age, ability, weight or race; belittling comments based on gender stereotypes; or references to a woman's sexual attractiveness continue as a common rhetoric in the media and undermine women in leadership. Families of women in positions of decision-making and leadership also report facing abuse through intense media focus on personal details of their lives – a scrutiny that does not exist with male counterparts. It is the responsibility of politicians, respective parties, institutions, police, legislature, media and civic society to challenge abusive behaviour and tackle the issue at its root. We need to remove barriers to participation and decision-making to enable real transformative change to occur.

Climate change not only poses an existential risk to human life it is increasing the number of women and girls in poverty. By 2025, climate change may find 158.3 million more women and girls in poverty (16 million more than the total number of men and boys). Women and girls already bear the brunt of immediate and long-lasting impacts of environmental degradation, natural disasters and changing climates.

Societies must adjust to ensure sustainable human development which works in harmony with our environments, not exploit them to destruction. Economies and the world of work must adjust to limit irreversible climate change now. To achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the context of climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction policies and programmes, women must be leaders and decision makers creating and implementing policies and programmes. Women and girls are agents of change; they understand how climate change impacts them, and they know how to solve these challenges. Rural and indigenous women in particular have been working for years to reverse environmental degradation, preserve natural and local resources, and bring about a more harmonious relationship with nature.

Despite advances in some countries, 75 per cent of women in developing regions are in the informal economy where they will be more likely to be low paid, have less or no access to employment contracts, advancement opportunities, legal rights (labour law exclusions) or social protections. Women occupy a higher proportion in non-standard employment in both the public and private sectors, pre-COVID figures show 57 per cent of part-time workers worldwide are women, there is no doubt that this has increased since COVID. Women compared to men, experience a double disadvantage in both wages and job security as their wage scale framed by the male breadwinner model keeps their wages at a low level, and increases the feminisation of poverty. Casualisation of the workforce increases the vulnerability of women who take up this work to adjust to care responsibilities in the home which remain predominately gendered. The Gender Pay Gap is at 68 per cent globally.

Older women are increasingly facing poverty by unequal opportunities, lack of advancement and gender-pay in employment, pension gaps and discriminatory tax policies. Only 26.3 per cent of working age women worldwide and 8.1 per cent in lower-middle income countries are covered under a pension scheme. These structural and institutional settings have been brought about by colonialism, imperialism, and patriarchy. Chronic underfunding of adequate and affordable public care services as well as the COVID-19 pandemic have exacerbated older women's burden of unpaid care work, taken away opportunities in employment and access to the public care services for themselves, thereby, making older women's poverty persistent. The pandemic increased older women's unpaid domestic work and care: 57 per cent of older women, respectively, reported an increase in domestic work for disability and childcare. A third of older women aged 50–59 and a quarter of older women aged 60 and over have been deprived of basic needs such as water, food, money, etc., or is aware of another woman who has experienced deprivation of basic needs.

It is important for States to review their labour laws and policies to allow casual and part-time workers full access to labour laws, social protections and opportunities for progression. It is key to situate unpaid care, domestic and communal work in the context of advancement of gender justice, the right to development and human rights and provide social protections, through provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and through financial support in national budgets to increase access to care facilities for all and promote shared responsibilities for caring within the household and family.

There is a dire need to strengthen legislative and statutory reforms and policy initiatives across governments; to support the production and use of sex disaggregated data and gender analysis to inform government policies and programmes;

Gender disaggregated data and evidence are crucial for transformative action on gender equality as this enables us all to accurately define and measure issues, identify gaps and inform decision making and ensure accountability. This data will assist in ensuring our lived experiences are included in decision-making.

In collecting data it is key to strengthen consultative mechanisms with civil society groups, including women's advocacy groups, on key budget and policy issues of national and sub-national governments and invest in resourcing Indigenous data sovereignty and inclusion of community-led organisations to collect and analyse their own data.
