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**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”**

Statement submitted by International Relations Students' Association of McGill University, 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

[This statement is presented by the McGill Youth Advisory Delegation, a portfolio of the International Relations Students' Association of McGill University, a youth-led non-governmental organization holding consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council since 2006. The organization is committed to integrating young people's voices into policy decisions. Through community consultations and partnerships with youth-centred organizations, we work alongside policymakers to ensure that diverse youth perspectives are represented in decision-making.

As we reflect on the outcome document of the 70th Commission on the Status of Women, we recognize progress made yet remain cognizant of the growing polarization within decisions and discussions that pertain to women's rights and gender equality. Women and girls continue to face a standstill in the advancement of their rights and an increasing backsliding on codified rights. These challenges impede the achievement of gender equality and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

In response to the above, and according to the priority theme of the 71st Commission on the Status of Women, we draw attention to three areas that are essential to accelerating the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Our calls to action target addressing systemic bias in women's health, expanding access to education as a pathway to economic empowerment for girls and women, and safeguarding previously agreed-upon language while advancing more progressive commitments.

I. Closing the Research Gap in Women's Health

Women's health is systematically deprioritized within medical research. A 2024 Nature Reviews Bioengineering study shows that in 2020, 1% of global research and development funding went to non-oncological women's health issues. This is compounded by a research gap, reflected in women's underrepresentation in medical studies. According to Recio-Barbero and Romero-Jimenez's research, women make up 41% of clinical trial participants and sex-specific data is analyzed in less than 30% of medical studies. This exclusion leaves treatment and diagnostic criteria centred on men's physiology, causing side effects, delayed diagnosis, and misdiagnosis in women.

This gap in women's health stems from systemic exclusion: women were largely absent from medical studies until the 1990s, and their health issues have continued to be under-researched relative to their disease burden, meaning a disease's impact on a population. According to the World Economic Forum's 2024 report, this exclusion means women spend 25% more of their lives in poor medical conditions than men. Additionally, closing this gap would benefit the global economy by \$1 trillion United States Dollars annually by 2040 if poor health no longer holds women back from work.

This issue undermines Sustainable Development Goal 3, Good Health and Well-Being, and Sustainable Development Goal 5, Gender Equality. Therefore, women's health is a natural priority for the 71st Commission on the Status of Women, whose mandate to accelerate gender equality cannot be achieved while women's health is overlooked. For the McGill Youth Advisory Delegation, this is central to our mission of centring youth voices, as young women and girls disproportionately bear these health burdens. To achieve the

objectives of the priority theme outlined by the 71st Commission on the Status of Women, we call upon Member States and relevant partners to prioritize discussions and policies that:

- Strengthen domestic resource mobilization and equitable public financing mechanisms, including gender-responsive budgeting, to ensure sustainable investment in women's health research;
- Encourage collection and analysis of sex-disaggregated data across medical research;
- Strengthen women's representation in clinical trials so that participation rates reflect disease prevalence.

II. Increasing Access to Meaningful Education

Education provides the knowledge, skills, and values fundamental to building a fulfilling life. Through the 28th Article of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Member States recognized the education of the child as a right and agreed upon making primary education available to all. Yet only 49% of countries have achieved gender parity in primary education, according to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization. This gap is further exacerbated for girls in rural areas, where unsafe journeys, namely due to street harassment, often make attendance challenging; with no digital infrastructure to support alternative methods of education, many are deprived of schooling altogether. Globally, this could result in a loss of lifetime productivity and earnings valued at \$15-30 trillion United States Dollars, according to a 2018 World Bank study.

Education plays a pivotal role in women's economic empowerment, endowing them with the human capital necessary for productive employment, while improving their

children's health and educational prospects. Thus, alongside ensuring equal access to education, Member States should equip women and girls with the practical skills needed to turn opportunity into economic independence. This includes integrating financial, legal, and media literacy programs into education, enabling women and girls to understand their rights and learn how to make reasoned economic decisions in an increasingly digital world.

Empowerment is rooted in the ability for young women to shape their own futures, which relies on accessible specialized education, directly aligning with Sustainable Development Goal 4, Quality Education. Therefore, to achieve the objectives of the priority theme outlined by the 71st Commission on the Status of Women, we call upon Member States and relevant partners to prioritize discussions and policies that:

- Establish networks specific to eliminating gender inequalities in education and increase gender-responsive, sustainable public financing;
- Invest in digital learning opportunities, ensuring that digitalization reduces geographical and time constraints;
- Integrate financial, law, and media literacy into education to ensure that women and girls can truly be empowered by the knowledge and abilities they gain.

III. Strengthening the Framework for Agreed-Upon Language

At the 70th Commission on the Status of Women, the outcome document was adopted through a recorded vote rather than by consensus for the first time in the Commission's history. This practice sets a dangerous precedent. Member States should be able to agree on new language and preserve previously agreed-upon language. Gender equality and women's rights continue to sit at a standstill in global politics; in 2024 UN Women's Women's Rights

in Review 30 Years after Beijing reported that 1 in 4 countries is experiencing a backlash against women's rights, and consequently, in 2025, the Team Lewis Foundation found a 60% increase in concern about the lack of progress on gender equality, further citing gender equality as one of the top three global concerns. As women's rights become increasingly contested, so does language regarding gendered and women's issues.

Following the outcome document of the 70th Commission on the Status of Women, we encourage Member States to take a stronger stance against regression in agreed-upon language and push for more progressive language in the outcome document for the 71st session. Progressive language refers to terminology that pushes for the advancement of rights and, by nature, pushes for greater social inclusion and access to services. Progressive language directly supports the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls, particularly in relation to Sustainable Development Goal 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions. Meaningful inclusion of youth and women is key to achieving this goal; they usually face the largest consequences of backsliding, yet are systematically underrepresented in decision-making processes. When specific language is incorporated in official multilateral documents, it helps shape political priorities by formally recognizing the realities and experiences of affected communities. When issues have the proper visibility, societies become more inclusive by virtue of more representative decision-making processes, which trickle down into all aspects of our society. To achieve the objectives of accelerating the achievement of gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls as outlined by the 71st Commission on the Status of Women, we call upon Member States and relevant partners to prioritize discussions and policies that:

- Work to establish a principle of non-regression on previously agreed-upon language;
- Encourage greater use of progressive language that addresses emerging and overlooked issues;
- Strengthen civil society and youth participation in language recommendations to ensure a robust representation of issues faced.

This statement is endorsed by:

- Life Project 4 Youth
- Women of Color Advancing Peace, Security, and Conflict Transformation
- International Alliance of Women
- Youth for Tax Justice Network
- Canadian Federation of University Women |