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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 Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of
the Good Shepherd, Grail, The, Institute of the Blessed Virgin
Mary – Loreto Generalate, Society of Catholic Medical
Missionaries, and VIVAT International, non-governmental
organizations 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

The Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary-Loreto Generalate, Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, The Grail, Society of Catholic Medical Missionaries, and VIVAT International welcome the 70th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women's focus on "ensuring and strengthening access to justice for all women and girls, including by promoting inclusive and equitable legal systems, eliminating discriminatory laws, policies, and practices, and addressing structural barriers".

Our organizations collaborate with and support women, girls, their families and communities in over 100 countries offering programs in education, mentoring, economic, political and social capacity building that enable them to self-advocate and claim their human rights. We are committed to the realization of gender equality and the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all girls and women, throughout their lifetime.

Unequal and unjust legal systems, policies, and practices disproportionately affect women and girls. They experience fewer legal rights globally, reducing their capacity for financial independence and perpetuating poverty. Their insecure economic and social conditions are further compounded by legal limitations, weak enforcement, and cultural norms that create systemic barriers to women and girls' full participation and empowerment.

According to the Justice for Women: High-Level Group Report (2020), women continue to face barriers in areas such as family and marriage, property and inheritance, land and housing, due process, immigration and asylum, labor exploitation, and self-employment. In countries like Nigeria and Niger, women's rights to own or manage land often do not overlap, leaving many without tenure over the very spaces where they live and work. Equal legal access to land and justice benefits entire families and societies—improving children's education and health and enhancing national income and competitiveness.

In India, Kenya, Uganda and Mozambique patriarchal inheritance laws and financial requirements—like collateral or guarantors—exclude many women, particularly in rural areas. Most property documents are in men's names, and gender-based wage disparities persist. Women's limited access to credit, land, and employment opportunities perpetuates dependency and limits economic agency.

The World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Report 2025 Insight Report highlights that although 68.8 per cent of the global gender gap has been closed, significant disparities remain in women's access to justice and leadership. Despite progress toward gender-equal legal frameworks, a widespread "implementation gap" undermines enforcement. Women remain underrepresented in decision-making, holding fewer than one-third of parliamentary speaker positions and less than 30 per cent of senior management roles. Although women surpass men in tertiary education, their global workforce participation stands at just 41.2 per cent. Gender-based segregation persists, and women are 55 per cent more likely to take career breaks due to caregiving responsibilities. High standards alone are insufficient—effective enforcement and institutional support are critical to achieving justice and equality.

Our networks in India, Nepal, Kenya, Peru, the Philippines, Mozambique, South Africa, Spain and Zimbabwe confirm that while progress has been achieved through laws ensuring equal pay, maternity leave, and protection from harassment, enforcement remains uneven. Spain has introduced gender pay audits and equal parental leave, while India and Nepal include inheritance and labor rights protections. Yet women in the informal sector remain largely unprotected. In Kenya and parts of

India, customary law continues to override statute, especially in land and property inheritance.

Weak enforcement undermines workplace protections, custody orders, and domestic violence laws. Slow judicial processes, stigma, and limited training among officials hinder justice for survivors. Women in rural and informal settlements face financial and geographic barriers to legal aid, often fearing retaliation for seeking justice. Even strong legal frameworks, such as Spain's equality plans or India's workplace harassment law, fail to reach women in small enterprises or remote areas. Strengthening enforcement mechanisms and extending protection to informal workers is essential.

While India's Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (2005) provides a legal foundation, survivors struggle to claim maintenance or custody due to delays, insensitive handling by authorities, and financial dependency—undermining the law's protective intent.

These injustices perpetuate poverty, exploitation, and mental distress not only of women and girls but including their families –costing countries billions in lost productivity and hindering national development. Ensuring and strengthening access to justice for all women and girls demands more than progressive laws—it requires their full and consistent enforcement, adequate resourcing, and cultural transformation. We therefore call on Member States, governments and leaders to:

Reform Unjust Legal Systems

- Address institutional bias against women and girls.
- Integrate gender-based analysis into all policy and program design and provide gender-specific funding to close gaps in legal access.
- Reform financial systems to ensure women's equal access to credit and banking without male guarantors or land collateral.
- Promote women's financial independence through inclusive access to banking, credit, and insurance.

Invest in Women in the Workforce

- Support women's workforce participation through affordable childcare, flexible schedules, and family-friendly workplace policies.
- Enforce equal pay for equal work across public and private sectors, with accountability mechanisms.
- Establish living wages for care sector workers.
- Recognize and compensate unpaid care work by integrating it into pension and benefit systems.
- Strengthen pay-audit enforcement and gender-balance quotas on boards, extending equality-plan requirements to smaller businesses.

Invest in Education for Girls and Women

- Expand legal literacy programs and establish fast-track courts for family and inheritance cases.
- Increase funding for free, quality education for girls and for scholarships enabling women to re-enter education.

- Support public education campaigns to dismantle stereotypes and promote women's leadership across sectors.
- Develop gender-specific financial literacy programs to empower girls and women to manage income and investments.

Implement Gender Diversity in Leadership

- Eliminate gender bias and stereotypes, including in media portrayals of girls and women in leadership.
- Encourage companies to cultivate gender-diverse leadership teams and boards.
- Provide girls with safe, inclusive, and supportive spaces for participation and expression.

Invest in Women's Reproductive Health and Rights

- Guarantee affordable, accessible healthcare, including maternal and reproductive services.
- Implement comprehensive, age-appropriate sexuality education that promotes awareness and bodily autonomy.
- Expand access to affordable, gender-responsive mental health services tailored to the needs of women and girls.

Women's access to justice is the foundation for achieving equality in every sphere—economic, political, and social. Our organizations reaffirm our collective commitment to advancing gender-just systems that uphold the dignity, autonomy, and rights of every girl and woman. We know from experience that gender equality does not only benefit women and girls but also their families, communities and the whole country.
