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entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and
peace for the twenty-first century”**

Statement submitted by UN Women National Committee Germany, 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

UN Women National Committee Germany welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the 70th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW70). This year's priority theme, focused on ensuring and strengthening access to justice for all women and girls, resonates deeply with our mission to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. Access to justice is a fundamental human right and an essential component of the rule of law. It is also a prerequisite for the realization of all other rights, including access to resources and representation. Yet, for many women and girls worldwide, justice remains out of reach due to discriminatory laws, patriarchal norms, structural barriers, and systemic inequalities.

More than 30 years after the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and with less than five years remaining to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the urgency of ensuring equitable access to justice cannot be overstated. Progress has been made, but significant gaps persist. To meet the global commitments under CEDAW, the Beijing Platform, and the 2030 Agenda, we must prioritize overcoming legal, economic, social, cultural and structural obstacles to justice for women and girls. Based on these principles, UN Women Germany identifies eight crucial areas of work.

1. Ensuring access to Justice

Justice is an instrument of empowerment. Equal access to justice allows all women and girls to claim their rights, dismantle discrimination, and hold perpetrators of violence and discrimination accountable. It fosters trust in institutions, strengthens social cohesion and

economic empowerment and reinforces democratic values. Without effective access to justice, too many women and girls remain marginalized, vulnerable to violence and discrimination, and excluded from full participation in society and economic activities on an equal footing with their male peers.

Full and equal consideration, access to and protection under labor laws, business rights, property rights, and the rights of smallholders is essential for women's full economic participation and empowerment.

The importance of access to justice is recognized across international instruments. Article 15 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) guarantees women equality before the law, Article 2 obliges States to eliminate discrimination in all forms. The 2030 Agenda's Sustainable Development Goal 16 underscores the need for "peace, justice, and strong institutions", while Goal 5 emphasizes the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls. These frameworks establish a global consensus: access to justice is essential for achieving gender equality.

2. Dismantling Structural Barriers to Justice

Despite legal frameworks that recognize gender equality, women and girls encounter structural barriers that impede their ability to access justice effectively. These barriers include:

- Discriminatory laws and practices: In many countries, laws directly or indirectly discriminate women and girls, particularly in areas such as full and equal participation, family law, inheritance, property rights, and citizenship.
- Economic barriers: High legal costs and limited access to legal aid make justice inaccessible for too many women, particularly those living in poverty, migrants, and marginalized groups. Equal rights and access to and control over productive resources, economic empowerment and full economic participation and independence of women are fundamental prerequisites for gender equality.
- Geographic barriers: Citizens in rural and remote areas often lack access to courts, legal professionals, and institutions, meaning they have to travel long distances, bear additional costs, not to mention the risk of gender-based violence. This affects women in particular.
- Cultural and social barriers: Patriarchal norms, stigma, and the fear of reprisals often prevent women from fully participating in decision-making processes and from seeking justice, especially in cases of gender-based violence, where misogynistic attitudes such as victim blaming are commonplace.
- Institutional barriers: Legal systems often lack gender sensitivity, with limited female representation in the judiciary, inadequate training on gender equality for legal professionals, and processes that re-traumatize or victim-blame survivors.
- Intersectional barriers: Women with disabilities, Black and indigenous women, LGBTQIA+ persons, migrants, refugees, and others experiencing intersecting

forms of discrimination, face particularly significant barriers in accessing justice.

3. Eliminating Discriminatory Laws and Practices

The persistence of discriminatory laws is one of the most significant barriers to justice for women and girls. Reforming legal frameworks is critical to ensuring equality before the law. UN Women Germany calls upon governments to:

- Undertake comprehensive legal reviews to identify and repeal laws that discriminate against women in areas such as citizenship and legal identity, participation, marriage, inheritance, property, employment, and creditworthiness.
- Align national legislation with international commitments, particularly CEDAW, the Istanbul Convention, the 2030 Agenda and the Beijing Platform for Action.
- Ensure equal and meaningful participation of women in law-making processes, including representation of marginalized groups whose perspectives are often excluded.
- Integrate gender-responsive budgeting to ensure adequate resources for implementing legal reforms.
- Guarantee abortions as a right to sexual and reproductive health as well as physical self-determination and therefore exempt from punishment.

4. Strengthening Gender-Sensitive Legal Systems

Legal systems must be revived, and transformed where necessary, to foster, ensure and safeguard gender equality. This requires structural reforms that address both procedures and outcomes. UN Women Germany highlights the following priorities:

- Gender training for legal professionals: Judges, prosecutors, law enforcement officers, and court personnel must be trained in gender dynamics, survivor-centered and trauma-informed approaches, and the elimination of bias.
 - Increasing representation of women in the judiciary: Women remain underrepresented in judicial and prosecutorial positions globally. Their participation strengthens fairness, legitimacy, and inclusivity.
 - Accessible and affordable legal aid: States must provide free or subsidized legal services for women and girls from marginalized backgrounds, especially survivors of violence.
 - Alternative dispute resolution mechanisms: While ensuring safeguards for women's rights, community-based and restorative justice approaches can expand access to justice in contexts where formal systems are inaccessible.
 - Digital innovations: Technology can bridge geographic and financial barriers, including through online legal aid platforms, mobile courts, and digital complaint mechanisms. However, digital justice solutions must account for the digital divide and ensure inclusivity and protection.
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5. Eliminating Gender-Based Violence Through Justice Systems

Gender-based violence (GBV) remains one of the most pervasive human rights violations globally. Justice systems must play a central role in preventing violence, protecting survivors, and ensuring accountability. UN Women Germany emphasizes:

- **Criminalization of all forms of GBV:** Governments must ensure comprehensive legislation addressing domestic violence, sexual violence, harassment, harmful practices, and emerging forms of digital violence. The impunity of perpetrators must no longer be accepted or fostered. All crimes of GBV must be consistently prosecuted.
- **Strategic approach:** In the long term, governments must establish and implement a comprehensive, interdepartmental strategy to end GBV in the long term. This should include comprehensive legal reforms to ensure that all survivors have access to justice, protection, and assistance, as well as prevention measures that begin in childhood.
- **Survivor-centered justice:** Judicial processes should protect the dignity, safety, and confidentiality of survivors, including through protective orders, trauma-informed approaches, and the prevention of secondary victimization.
- **Women, Peace and Security:** Increase the representation of women in justice systems during and after crises and conflicts. Consider the specific needs of women and girls in conflict situations and involve them equally in all decision-making processes and peace negotiations, in accordance with UN Resolution 1325.

- Data collection and monitoring: Robust, disaggregated data is essential to assess justice system responses to GBV and inform evidence-based reforms.
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6. Addressing Intersectional Discrimination

Access to justice must be inclusive of everyone, particularly all women and girls, recognizing their diverse identities and experiences. Intersectionality requires tailored approaches to dismantle multiple layers of discrimination. UN Women Germany calls for:

- Targeted legal aid and outreach for women facing intersecting discrimination, including those with disabilities, Black and indigenous women, older women, LGBTQIA+ persons, migrants, and refugees.
 - Inclusive policy frameworks that explicitly recognize intersectional barriers and adopt holistic responses.
 - Monitoring and accountability mechanisms that capture data disaggregated by gender, race, age, disability, ethnicity, and migration status.
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7. Empowering Civil Society and Human Rights Defenders

Civil society organizations, women's rights groups, and human rights defenders are indispensable partners in advancing access to justice. They provide legal aid, raise awareness, advocate for reforms, and hold institutions accountable. However, many face shrinking funding and civic spaces, harassment, and violence. UN Women Germany urges:

- Protection of women human rights defenders through legal and institutional safeguards.

- Partnerships between governments and civil society to co-create justice solutions that are community-driven and sustainable.
 - Adequate funding for women's rights organizations and human rights defenders to ensure and expand their capacity and reach.
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8. Promoting Global and Regional Cooperation

Justice for women and girls is not solely a national issue; it requires coordinated international and regional action. UN Women Germany calls for:

- Strengthening international accountability mechanisms such as the International Criminal Court (ICC) and other multilateral human rights-based institutions and mechanisms.
- Promoting regional frameworks and courts that advance human rights, particularly women's rights and their access to justice.
- Cross-border cooperation to address issues such as trafficking, migration, and transnational crimes affecting women and girls.
- Knowledge sharing and best practices through global and regional networks, enabling governments to learn from successful reforms.