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Statement submitted by Marangopoulos Foundation for Human Rights, 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

The role of men and boys in promoting gender equality after the adoption of the post-2015 Development Agenda

The promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women remains a pertinent international topic, particularly in relation to the recent adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals.

The year 2015 marked two decades since the international community converged in Beijing for the Fourth World Conference on Women and adopted the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. The Beijing Declaration called upon explicitly — for the very first time — men to “participate fully in all actions towards gender equality” and stipulated equality between women and men as a matter of human rights and a condition for social justice. Therefore, the Declaration constitutes a necessary and fundamental prerequisite for equality, development and peace.

However, despite the fact that 20 years have passed, no state has currently fully achieved gender equality, as many barriers still continue to prevent women from having equal opportunities to men in all aspects of life, including in private and family life, education, health, employment and decision-making processes. Moving towards a gender-equal society has proven to be a complex task due to persistent gender stereotyping and the pervasive sociocultural, economic and political barriers that each society faces. Particularly, in regards to the role of men and boys, a gender-equal society often requires them to think and act in new ways, to reconsider traditional stereotypes of manhood and to reshape their relationship with women and girls.

Indeed, gender equality and empowerment are often thought of as being solely important to women. While it is essential to ensure that women are an active driving force in the promotion of gender equality, the empowerment of women directly contributes to local, national, regional, and international development for the benefit of the social as a whole. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights accordingly states that not only is gender equality “not a women’s issue” but that gender equality “should concern and fully engage men as well as women” (United Nations The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, “Universal Declaration of Human Rights — In six cross-cutting themes”, <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/UDHR/Pages/CrossCuttingThemes.aspx>). The Commission on the Status of Women “recognizes the capacity of men and boys in bringing about change in attitudes, relationships and access to resources and decision making which are critical for the promotion of gender equality and the full enjoyment of all human rights by women”; it has also established that “the negative impacts of gender inequality are borne by society as a whole” (United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, “The Role of Men and Boys in Achieving Gender Equality: Agreed Conclusions”, 12 March 2004, p. 1). The inclusion of men and boys as stakeholders in gender equality has a direct influence on eliminating discrimination, such as violence against women.

In the context of the post-2015 development agenda, women and girls’ empowerment and the protection of their rights are explicitly stated as one of the centrepieces of the Sustainable Development Goals. The enhanced role of their

rights clearly illustrates the importance of “transforming the structural factors that underpin the widespread persistence of gender inequalities, gender-based violence, discrimination and unequal development progress between women and men, girls and boys in the global agenda (United Nations System Task Team on the Post-2015 United Nations Development Agenda, “Realizing the Future We Want for All: Report to the Secretary-General”, 2012, pp. 23.). It becomes apparent that the United Nations system, learning from past experiences, has realized the crucial role of a comprehensive approach on a global, regional, and national level and therefore through this agenda seeks to develop a coherent, system-wide approach that ensures the implementation of an effective set of goals by governments and other stakeholders beyond 2015. It is our firm belief that a one-size-fits-all approach should not be encouraged in the post-2015 development agenda; instead, targets tailored to regional, national, and sub-national conditions and priorities should be applied.

The Marangopoulos Foundation for Human Rights welcomes the fact that in contrast to the Millennium Development Goals where the level of education was the only indicator to measure gender equality, the adopted Sustainable Development Goal 5 does not only focus on gender equality, but also proposes eight core indicators, such as prevalence of women that have experienced sexual or physical violence within a certain time frame, participation of women in regional or national policymaking, cases of child-marriage or harmful traditional practices, prevalence of women working under precarious labour conditions, percentage of investigated and sentenced cases of sexual and gender-based violence and others.

Being mindful of the fact that gender-based violence remains one of the most significant barriers in achieving gender equality, the Marangopoulos Foundation for Human Rights has recently launched a campaign in favour of the ratification by Greece of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, also known as the Istanbul Convention, which entered into force in August 2014. The Convention is the first legally binding instrument to create a comprehensive legal framework to protect women from acts of violence as well as prevent, prosecute and eliminate all forms of violence against women. The significance of the Convention lies also in that it establishes an international mechanism to monitor its implementation at the national level.

It is therefore of crucial importance that men and boys take — through networks, information campaigns and peer and training programmes — positive initiatives to eliminate gender traditional stereotypes, which, among other factors, generate violence against women.

In this regard, we fully acknowledge the critical role of gender-sensitive education and training in achieving gender equality. The design and implementation of programmes to accelerate a socio-cultural change towards gender equality — especially through the upbringing and educational process, including professional training and lifelong education — in terms of changing harmful traditional perceptions and attitudes of male and female roles will gradually enable the achievement of the full and equal participation of women and men in the society.

At this critical moment, it is important to note and highlight the key challenges that the international community will be confronted with when implementing the Sustainable Development Goals. With the new post-2015 Agenda for sustainable development, gender equality and zero tolerance for gender-based violence is an

issue that remains to be fulfilled in practice. However, the Marangopoulos Foundation for Human Rights believes that attention should be drawn to women's empowerment which is closely linked to, but goes beyond gender equality, as it is focused not only on the condition of women compared to that of men, but also considers the control over her own life and opportunities, as well as her increased role in the economic, social and political decision-making.

The Marangopoulos Foundation for Human Rights calls upon the Commission on the Status of Women to adopt the following measures, insisting on the necessary contribution of men and boys in achieving concrete results, and to ask and monitor closely their implementation by all actors, governmental, intergovernmental and non-governmental, including the business sector:

- Reaffirm the close link between the elimination of traditional stereotypes against women and gender equality: only through the fight against those stereotypes at all levels of the society, including the mass media and marketing policies, can we progress in this regard.
- Reaffirm that the economic and social empowerment of women is an inescapable condition for women's independence, especially in a period where women are the first victims — along with children — of fierce austerity policies in the developed world.
- Promote education and training in gender equality, which along with the above measures can cumulatively contribute to a significant decrease in violence against women and lead in the long run to the effective elimination of all forms of discrimination against women.