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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 Federation of Social Workers, 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 International Federation of Social Workers recognizes the significance of the priority theme of 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 federation is the global body for the profession and represents 3 million social workers through 150 + country-members. We affirm our role in, and support for, meeting the challenges of sustainable development through co-creating solutions while standing against exploitation of people and nature and against unjust structures that allow for wealth concentration in the hands of the few. Through the People's Charter for an Eco-social World (2022), we promote co-building a new eco-social world grounded in a holistic human rights framework inclusive of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, ecosystem rights and the broader rights of nature, leaving no one behind with our partners from trade unions, professional organizations and social movement groups. Our federation supports the full participation of women in all decision-making bodies and processes that affect the political, economic, social, educational and health concerns of women and girls (Women, 2012).

Indigenous knowledge and practices offer vital paradigms for the “new eco-social world” by modeling relational ethics that extend justice to the environment (Rights of Nature), prioritize collective well-being over individual wealth accumulation, and embed land rights within traditional stewardship and self-determination. The pursuit of justice for women and girls must recognize the inherent link between human rights and the health of the planet, which is a core tenet of Indigenous worldviews and reflected in the People's Charter. The current challenges and solutions that impact the goal of ensuring and strengthening access to justice for all women and girls requires this comprehensive holistic approach that is grounded in local and global knowledge and a commitment to a fairer, safer and more sustainable world. Social workers play a crucial role by advocating for inclusive and equitable legal systems, challenging discriminatory laws and policies, and addressing the structural barriers that perpetuate gender-based inequality (SDG5) while working towards peace, justice and strong institutions (SDG16) in an eco-social world. We will provide examples of how social workers do this work in collaboration with communities to promote women and girls' sexual and reproductive health and rights, and the right to land and land governance. While we use the expression “women” and “girls” we recognize gender-diverse people in this submission.

Ensuring and strengthening access to justice for women and girls requires peace, justice and a healthy environment in which institutions are strong and accessible, the vision of a new eco-social world. Conflict and crisis situations increase violence against women, poverty, food insecurity and barriers to sexual, reproductive and maternal health; climate change exacerbates these threats to women's health and wellbeing (WHO, 2023) and intensifies the barriers to strong institutions in which women can be actively involved in decision-making.

Marginalized women stand at the intersections of structural discrimination are on the frontlines of the highest risks of climate change and lack of access to justice; Indigenous and Afro-descendent women and girls, older women, LGBTQIA+ people, women and girls with disabilities, migrant women and those living in rural, remote, conflict and disaster-prone areas (UN Women, 2025). They are also on the frontlines of solutions, with social workers standing in solidarity by offering technical assistance through legal empowerment, psychosocial and direct support, advocacy and community-building and mobilization.

Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

Sexual and reproductive health and rights include a wide range of services essential to women's health and well-being and human rights, inclusive of addressing gender-based violence (SDG3). Globally, funding cuts have increased the threats to women's health and rights through the closure of programs that provided life-saving healthcare services, access to contraception and safe pregnancy and childbirth and abortion and care for survivors of gender-based violence. The loss of these institutions creates additional barriers to women's access to justice and health.

An innovative solution by an organization of young African social workers in Zimbabwe provides a roadmap toward building strong democratic institutions in combating gender-based violence through a program that combines advocacy, education, economic empowerment and community-driven interventions grounded in cultural values. This program creates spaces for reflection, connection and collective action by engaging men, traditional healers, health workers, youth, and marginalized groups to challenge harmful norms, expand access to critical services and contribute to social cohesion. The organization ensures survivors are supported to access legal justice, health, and support while empowering communities to sustain change. Economic empowerment works to reduce women and girls' vulnerability to exploitation through income generating activities that do not harm the environment.

Land Rights and Access to Justice

Women's land rights are essential for peace, democracy, security and sustainable development (OHCHR, insecure land rights), gender equality (SDG5), food security (SDG2), and ending poverty (SDG1). For women, ownership and control of land provides an economic asset and a foundation for agency, decision-making power and social protection (UNECA, 2025).

Barriers to land rights and access to justice lie in inheritance laws, the lack of legal literacy and community empowerment (Adegbite, 2025), and large-scale acquisitions of land by private corporations and investors, local elites, multilateral organizations, and regional trade initiatives (OCHR, 2017). In the context of climate justice, there is less arable land available and a rapid increase in dispossession and displacement in the last two decades due to powerful actors buying up land (Zoomers & Otsuki, 2025) for industrial agriculture, mining and other uses.

The recognition of Indigenous and customary land tenure systems is crucial for women's security, food sovereignty, and climate resilience (UNPFII, 2021), as these systems frequently offer stronger protections for women's access and control over land than modern and/or colonial legal frameworks. In support of solutions and leadership of global women on the frontlines of climate change, social workers are involved in international networks that engage women worldwide in policy advocacy, on-the-ground projects, direct action, training and movement-building for climate justice to connect and elevate their voices, actions, solutions and leadership.

The International Federation of Social Workers supports the Commission on the Status of Women with the following recommendations on ensuring and strengthening access to justice in the context of co-building an eco-social world. As each concern is interrelated, it is recommended that partnerships between the United Nations, civil society, and social work profession are strengthened and developed, grounded in the commitment to full and inclusive participation of women in all decision-making bodies. We make the following recommendations to global, national, local governments and people's assemblies to;

- Co-build enabling policy environments that prioritize sustainability, holistic human rights, gender justice and community self-determination. This includes

environments where women's health, autonomy, and well-being are safeguarded.

- Invest in building an infrastructure to support universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights. These services are fundamental to individual autonomy and must be integrated into a global eco-social approach that respects women's rights in all environments.
 - Invest in women and Social Workers to support programs that build resilient communities and offer innovative solutions to barriers to women's access to justice.
 - Change the laws and social norms that create barriers to women's right to own and control land. This includes adopting measures to prevent private corporations and investors, local elites, multilateral organizations, and regional trade initiatives, as well as family members from discriminating against women and communities in their rights to land.
 - Advocate for the legal and social recognition of Indigenous and customary land tenure systems and women's land tenure rights within these systems, as they offer stronger protections for women's access and control over land than modern and/or colonial legal frameworks.
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