



International Advocacy Reports and Statements

STATEMENT TO THE ILO COMMITTEE ON GENDER EQUALITY AT THE HEART OF DECENT

98TH INTERNATIONAL LABOUR CONFERENCE

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Thank you, Madame Chairperson for giving me the floor.

This statement is delivered on behalf of the following members of the NGO Committee on the Status of Women and its Working Group on Women's Employment and Economics of Gender: International Federation of University Women, International Business and Professional Women, International Alliance of Women, International Council of Women, Worldwide Organization of Women, Pan Pacific and South East Asia Women's Association, Zonta International, Federation of American Women's Clubs Overseas, International Network on Elderly Abuse, Inter-African Committee on Traditional Practices, Women's Federation for World Peace International.

We warmly congratulate the ILO and its staff who drafted the excellent and most comprehensive report (VI) on Gender Equality at the Heart of Decent Work. It is particularly of great value as it addresses the whole gamut of gender inequalities and decent work deficits accumulated throughout the life cycle. By providing a wealth of issues, statistical references and reliable evidences, the report proves the argument that it is essential for gender equality at work to be two pronged – i.e. have a human rights approach based principally on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the CEDAW Convention and the Fundamental Rights at Work which identify vulnerability and discrimination. The other prong should provide an environment and institutional and political structures conducive to economic empowerment of women which has been proven by financial institutions and others to be smart business

For want of time, members of our working group have selected the following vital comments, observations and recommendations for consideration by the Committee:

1. **Gender Equality Perspectives and Gender Mainstreaming.** The report clearly shows that Gender Equality perspectives at work should be institutionalised as a stand-alone and regular item of the International Labour Conference with its own adequate budget resource and programme of work if one wants to succeed in achieving full de facto equality.. We further propose that within this framework, gender mainstreaming should remain a systemic methodology in all the agenda items and programme of work of the ILO. This would ensure that there be no sacrificing or backsliding of equal rights and empowerment of women in favour of men's decent work or vice versa in crises periods. Today's global financial and economic crisis is a clear example where women's decent work and reproductive rights are being downscaled. .

International Federation of University Women

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2. **Caregiving.** Present societal norms whether public or private still consider women as the main custodians of children and the household and are personally responsible for this task. Women therefore have no choice but to carry the double and even triple burden of care giving and income-earning.. Maternity protection convention is a solution to ease this burden. We therefore strongly recommended to governments to promote the ratification of the maternity protection convention as well as parental and paternity leave and to provide and subsidise care giving facilities.
3. **Unpaid Work.** We consider it essential that when introducing equality laws and social security schemes, they should take account of all the invisible activities of unpaid work that contribute to the sustainability of enterprises and to sustainable development in general. Measuring unpaid work is an important indicator of gender economics and social disparities. Valuing unpaid work is a first step in modifying and widening the concept of labour. As ILO Director General Juan Somavia indicated, what we call economic productivity is in fact indirectly subsidized by the social productivity of unpaid work. Consequently, the statistical invisibility of unpaid work and the informal economy has caused women's major activities to be unrecognized and unvalued in macroeconomic policy and planning at national levels. It has also hampered the Decent Work Agenda of the ILO on gender equality and the enjoyment of equal human rights and rights to development of women.
4. **Equal Wage.** No country in the world has equal wage between women and men as the Report indicates. This is a result of many factors, significant of which are gender discrimination due to age, educational opportunities, stereotyping the division of labour where men's work is classified within higher wage brackets as compared to traditional female work. Furthermore unpaid work has not been valued as an economic subsidy to sustainable development. We commend the ILO for taking a life cycle approach in analysing gender inequality and to show that such discriminatory practice over the life course have had cumulative negative effects which have to be further analysed in determining wage and productive efficiency..
5. **Ageing population.** We recommend that this life cycle approach should particularly look at the ageing population especially women and the caring economy, both from the demand and supply side. Women are particularly productive as caregivers but in the long run, due to their living longer and their lack of social security benefits, they are themselves deprived as care takers and become victims of poverty and elderly abuse
6. **Role of Men and Boys.** The challenge today is to shift the role of men towards advancing women's economic, social and cultural rights and promoting gender equality through a better understanding and assessment of gender roles and related structural inequalities. This entails commitment, vigilance and action in promoting men's parenting role and their active involvement in harmonizing and reconciling work and family responsibilities on a shared basis, with a view to relieving the disproportionate burden affecting women's ability to access and retain work and girls being forced to drop out of school; to give increased attention to the role of men in preventing violence against women and HIV/AIDS infection among women and girls, especially given the asymmetric power relations and women's subordination and vulnerability to discrimination; to discourage adherence to ideas of inferiority or superiority between sexes brought about by peer pressures, socialization processes and belief systems which perpetuate stereotyping that exacerbate inequalities. In this context, we recommend higher ratification of ILO Convention 156 on Sharing of Work and Family Responsibility and to introduce or modify national legislation, policies and practices in order to align them with the provisions of ILC 156.
7. **Dismantling the Traditional Division of Labour.** Finally, we encourage dismantling the traditional division of labour that would provide, inter alia, women's equal access to information and communication technologies which, because of language, educational and skills deficits and lack of economic power, have generally excluded women from the information society, trade and entrepreneurship development.
8. **Gender and Age Disaggregated Data.** It is necessary to develop sex and age disaggregated statistics that would show where women and men are located in trade relations and human

development and how such economic asymmetries are affecting the sharing of family responsibilities and caring roles in the case of HIV/AIDS and other health-caring and health giving activities. Unfortunately, when we look at different systems of analysing economic development, we see glaring gender gaps. We see a continuing use of failed methods especially in traditional measures such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP), which fails to represent the whole economy of a region or a country, notably work done by women in the home as being “productive.” to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). This oversight penalises women not only in the home, but also in the workplace as their labour is consistently undervalued all over the world. We recommend greater efforts to correct this shortcoming by including unpaid household work in the System of National Accounts (SNA) (used to calculate the GDP), especially in developed countries. One approach to addressing this issue is precisely the use of household satellite accounts (HESA), which economists and policymakers would use in tandem with the GDP to increase the perceived value of work done by women whether in the home or in the workplace.

9. **Culture and religion** are entrenched in behavioural patterns and mental attitudes, exacerbated by stereotyping the economic and social roles of women and men. and creating a vicious cycle of multiple discriminatory practices favouring a patriarchal form of society. We recommend that the ILO should look at gender equality and decent work holistically and integrated with culture and religion which, according to the Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women of the Human Rights Council, are the most difficult factors in the struggle against gender inequality.
10. **Finally, we propose a methodology based on analysing systematically 5 criteria to test whether the basic concept of gender equality is being fully implemented in practice. These criteria are. equal accessibility, equal opportunity, equal treatment, equal choice and equal resources for sustainable development. Such criteria have to be present simultaneously and legally instrumentalised, otherwise if one or two elements are missing, there cannot be real gender equality**

