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peace for the twenty-first century”

Statement submitted by ABAAD Resource Center for Gender Equality, Let’s Breakthrough, Inc., MenEngage Global Alliance, Promundo-US, and Sonke Gender Justice Network, 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

We recognize the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA) as a bold, visionary instrument with the potential to make real changes in the lives of women, girls and LGBTIQ+ people, as well as men and boys, around the world. The BPfA has marked an inspiring framework for the realizations of women's rights, co-constructed through the tireless advocacy of feminist, LGBTIQ+ and youth movements across the regions. We also recognize the importance of the Commission on the Status of Women, as the principal space for the ongoing review of Member States' commitments and actions to gender equality and in implementing the visionary Platform.

However, over the last 30 years, the BPfA has not yet received the political commitment necessary for its potential and vision to be realized. This is especially true amidst a rising tide of regressive anti-rights patriarchal actors taking hold worldwide, including within civil society, the United Nations, and Governments. Equally, SDG Goal 5 Gender Equality, is falling short, with many indicators regressing instead of progressing.

We call attention to 100+ active conflicts worldwide, including civil wars, extremist violence, war between States, and military occupation- including Palestine/Israel, Lebanon, Iran, Myanmar, Ukraine, South Sudan and Haiti, among others. Calls for immediate ceasefire and de-escalation remain urgent. As well, reform of the politically grid-locked UN Security Council, as agreed in the Pact of the Future. We stand in solidarity with all the victims and survivors of the inhumane devastations of war and call for immediate action to sustain life-saving services for people in conflict and post-conflict situations. We strongly believe that any form of war cannot co-exist with feminist ideals as laid out in the BPfA. War arises as part of a patriarchal logic that valorizes aggression, occupation, and domination, enforced through the expression of militarized masculinities. These dominant, militaristic norms and systems, including exploitative economies of war and a powerful military industrial complex, are in complete contradiction with the goals of the BPfA, which can't be achieved until we realize feminist peace everywhere, for everyone.

The Mission Statement of the BPfA “emphasize[d] that women share common concerns that can be addressed only by working together and in partnership with men towards the common goal of gender equality around the world (Chapter 1, paragraph 3)”. To achieve gender equality, we must dismantle the unequal power structures that are at the root of gender inequality. These deeply held patriarchal beliefs come to life in social norms, institutionalized practices, and systemic structures that act in concert to maintain and magnify all forms of violence and discrimination against women, girls, and LGBTIQ+ peoples. Part of this task involves examining and deconstructing patriarchal masculinities and engaging men and boys to transform their attitudes and behaviors toward rejecting a culture where violence, domination, control, extraction, and impunity are acceptable.

Since this call, we have observed the proliferation of work to engage men and boys in gender justice worldwide. This work has increasingly sought to make pace with feminist agendas, going beyond a focus on ending GBV, to expanding across the full range of themes of the BPfA, including dismantling militarized masculinities, redistribution of unpaid care, fatherhood and policy reform towards economies of care, working on climate justice, advancing youth leadership, expanding GBV work to online violence and the role of technology in facilitating patriarchal masculinities online, advocating for SRHR for all, LGBTIQ+ rights, gender-transformative education, health, and more. Some of these efforts, including through our collective membership at MenEngage Alliance, and alongside ECOSOC accredited members

ABAAD, Let's Breakthrough, Sonke Gender Justice, and Equimundo, have increasingly focused on intersectional feminist approaches to engage men and boys, centered on the principles of accountability towards feminist, LGBTIQ+, youth, persons with disabilities, and other marginalized movements, working through gender transformative approaches to dismantle patriarchal masculinities from the individual to the systemic levels.

We welcome the increased global interest in engaging men and boys over the last 30 years. However, this increased interest, now carried out by Governments, UN agencies, INGOs, and civil society, has led to questions over how this work may be falling short of being fully supportive to women's rights. Indeed, if work with boys and men is not informed by intersectional feminist, accountable and gender transformative approaches, then there is a risk that such programs may reproduce and reaffirm male privileges, take up disproportional space in feminist discourses, compete for limited resources, and, ultimately, be harmful to the cause of gender equality. We must ensure that all work to engage men and boys and to transform patriarchal masculinities is carried out in political and nuanced ways that add value to broader struggles for justice, human rights, care and peace, and which place patriarchy as the central root cause for gender inequality and work to dismantle it in all its forms.

We also know that anti-patriarchal work with men and boys is imperative at this time of rising backlash. The "manosphere", an online ecosystem of groups focused on "men's issues" and organized around misogyny and antifeminism is growing. Studies concluded that newer groups within the manosphere are more toxic and misogynistic than older ones started decades ago. The manosphere has been able to network misogynistic, homophobic, and transphobic online attacks with unprecedented scale and speed. The orchestration of such attacks, many against feminist and LGBTIQ+ activists and women politicians, is well documented. Research is also looking at the experiences of men and boys participating in this online ecosystem. Some have focused on the anonymity and social permission granted through online peer groups to explain the increase in men's online misogynistic, homophobic, and transphobic behavior. Others have emphasized the ways in which a crisis of masculinity, however varied in origin (real or perceived), has fueled an intensely felt sense of grievance, anger, and anxiety among a growing number of men. Online spaces like the manosphere become a place for finding community, seeking support, venting feelings, and, for some, taking revenge.

The rising patriarchal backlash is also having political consequences. Recent decades of progress in feminist work to reject patriarchal norms and systems and demanding political rights is increasingly being met with backlash, evident in the rise of misogynistic authoritarian 'strongmen' in several countries, who are openly misogynist, homophobic and transphobic in public statements and, in some cases, policy proposals. The last five years have witnessed a significant regression in policies and legislation, political discourse and public speech on issues of gender and sexuality in a number of countries. Central to this growing authoritarianism is a conservative anti-feminist political discourse of 'family values' and the attack upon 'gender ideologies', which both organize around a heteronormative patriarchal binary of masculine authority and feminine domesticity. Authoritarian leaders have worked to roll back progressive legislation on sexual and reproductive health and rights in a number of countries and increased political attacks on organizations working for LGBTIQ rights and women's rights. Backlash actors have increasingly coalesced and organized as interconnected coalitions working through a transnational scope, taking joint political actions, and bringing together religious institutions, politicians, academics, think tanks, and entrepreneurs. Co-optation of human rights frameworks and language is particularly significant in their strategy of norms-spoiling, which

seeks to undermine the legitimacy of women's rights norms from national to international levels.

We must unpack how men and masculinities are implicated in the rising anti-rights backlash and what can be done about it. Amidst an apparent declining support among men and boys for feminism and gender equality – and the organized appeal of anti-rights groups and actors to men and boys, including through the manosphere, men's rights groups, misogynist influencers, and strong-man politicians who are being voted for worldwide, it is imperative to continue to promote strategies to transform men and boys into active allies for gender, social, climate justice and peace.

At this critical moment – the 30th anniversary of the Beijing Conference and Platform for Action – a moment for bold political will towards women's rights and gender justice globally, we urge governments to demonstrably increase their commitment to the goals of the Beijing Platform for Action and to end gender inequality once and for all, including through investment in official mechanisms that hold them accountable for their words. We also urge all Governments to advance anti-patriarchal and gender-transformative programs, policies and initiatives to engage men and boys and to transform patriarchal masculinities to realize the rights of all women, girls and LGBTIQ people worldwide.
