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sustainable development

### Statement submitted by Women's Health and Education Center (WHEC), a non-governmental organization in special status with the Economic and Social Council<sup>1</sup>

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.

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<sup>1</sup> The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

### **Strengthening global partnership (SDG 17) through food security and public health**

The entire world is at war with an invisible enemy – the novel coronavirus. The most important lessons learned from COVID-19 pandemic are: 1) this war must be fought together, and 2) we are all in this together. These lessons will and should help us to build and strengthen the global partnerships. The public health issues can help us create new pathways and understandings. Building stronger alliances between the Member States through public health and succeeding with United Nations Agenda 2030 is the way forward for all.

The novel coronavirus and the disease it causes, COVID-19, have triggered unprecedented turmoil and disruption around the world. Empty streets, shuttered shops, overflowing hospitals. With a vaccine to protect against the disease still a distant possibility, our best weapon remains staying away from each other – interacting more and more in the virtual sphere for education and business. While social distancing saves lives, it drags down the global economy and threatens jobs. Middle and high-income countries in Asia, Europe and North America have been particularly hard hit so far. The expectation and fear are that it is only a matter of time before the disease strikes with full force to the less stable societies and economies, where the damage could be exponentially worse.

The Women's Health and Education Center (WHEC) with the UN System and the World Health Organization (WHO) are looking closely at the implications of the spread of the virus in those countries – including those that host Special Political Missions – and sounding the alarm. The virus has changed the way we live. The *WHEC Global Health Line (WGHL)*, available at [http://www.womenshealthsection.com/content/cme/WHEC\\_Global\\_Health\\_Line.pdf](http://www.womenshealthsection.com/content/cme/WHEC_Global_Health_Line.pdf) is freely accessible in 227 countries and territories. WGHL is an e-Health platform with special focus on maternal and child health. The platform disseminates knowledge to the international community in public health, helping it to sharpen its focus and act more effectively. It is a grand collaboration and available in six official languages of the United Nations.

The economic devastation wrought by the coronavirus was relatively easy to predict, at least once it became clear how deadly and contagious the pathogen was. Factory and shop closures are sure signs of immediate and future economic pain. Months into the crisis, however, it is less clear what the ultimate effect will be on the many conflicts and peace processes around the world. What there is in abundance right now is concern that countries and communities ravaged by this pandemic-war will not be able to withstand the onslaught of the virus. So great is the threat of COVID-19 to life and livelihoods that it should dwarf the reasons parties in conflict put forward to continue to fight. With COVID-19, even the most worn slogans seem justified: We *are* all – governments, opposition forces, civil society – in this together. The virus truly is our common enemy.

Even before the crisis, we had been devoting a lot of attention on how innovation and technology can help us bring more people – women, youth and traditionally disenfranchised – into peace, remote learning and political processes. The current situation should provide a good testing ground. The situation is, among other things, helping us think through some potential issues.

For example, for now, it is relatively easy for us to work, do business and set up educational programs remotely, as we have the technology and resources. But if more of this work (business, education and socializing) moves to the virtual sphere –

permanently, *how do we ensure that those who do not have technology or ICT (information and communication technology) infrastructure access or resources can also participate in the new ways of doing business or getting quality education?*

The “Health of Nations” also matters. In the future the wealthiest states, or those economies offering the best long-term investment opportunities, look to be those with vibrant life science capabilities and infrastructure. The crisis of developing countries significantly weakened by the economic shockwaves from the COVID-19 crisis is a very vicious combination of an economic crisis and a health crisis. So, we have got to find ways of strengthening the healthcare system and services in developing countries and building up resilience on that front very quickly.

**WHEC’s strategy on e-Health is focused on:**

1. Strengthening health systems in countries;
2. Fostering public-private partnerships in information and communication technologies (ICT) research and development for health and education;
3. Supporting capacity building for e-Health applications worldwide; and
4. Development and the use of norms and standards.

**e-Government and e-health platforms to attain United Nations’ Agenda**

As governments transition towards e-government and e-health throughout the world, there is growing acknowledgment of the role that the e-government and e-health could play to harness ICT for women’s empowerment and gender equality. Recognizing this critical gap, WHEC as a part of gender equality initiatives aims to enhance knowledge awareness of good practices of gender-responsive capacity of governments to harness this tool towards women’s empowerment.

The challenges and opportunities are here.

WHEC hopes this inspires us all to build a better world and many meaningful projects and programs for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development of the United Nations.

International development has moved beyond charity. It has reached a new, globally competitive stage, bringing with it enormous strategic and economic implications for all the nations and citizens of the world in the years ahead.

Join the efforts!

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