

**Fifty-fifth session**

22 February -4 March 2011

Item 3 (a) (i) of the provisional agenda\*

**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”: implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: access and participation of women and girls to education, training, science and technology, including for the promotion of women’s equal access to full employment and decent work**

**Statement submitted by Zonta International, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council.**

The undersigned, Zonta International President Dianne Curtis, presents to the participants of the 55<sup>th</sup> session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women the following statement for the consideration of the Commission in its deliberations on the theme of “Access and participation of women and girls to education, training, science and technology, including for the promotion of women’s equal access to full employment and decent work.”

Zonta International is a non-governmental organization which enjoys General Consultative Status with ECOSOC accreditation. It is an international organization which reaches over 31,000 members worldwide. Founded in 1919, Zonta International’s mission has always been to advance the status of women. In 1938, Zonta International established the Amelia Earhart Fellowship Program to encourage and financially support women pursuing PH.D./doctoral degrees in aerospace-related sciences and aerospace-related engineering. The Fellowships were established as a living memorial to Zontian and aviatrix Amelia Earhart and are intended to encourage women to expand their career options beyond traditional borders. Since its inception, there have been 1297 Fellowships totaling US\$7 million given to 902 Fellows from 64 countries. Through advocacy, Zonta International is dedicated to helping women break through the obstacles to education, especially in the areas of science, technology and engineering.

As evidenced by the reports of the expert panel convened by the Commission, there are many areas of achievement that still need to be addressed and we would like to make our recommendations and note some issues which need the attention of the Commission. Among these are:

- The enforcement of educational equality laws especially in the fields of science, technology, and engineering. While many countries have enacted such laws, implementation is necessary for changes to occur.

- The Beijing Platform for Action emphasizes the need for increasing access to science and technology education for women and this was reinforced in 2000 in a special session of the General Assembly.
- Bias and gender stereotyping are both limiting aspects to women's education and empowerment. These stereotypes must be abandoned so that women and girls can truly reach full empowerment.
- Because women and girls are being marginalized in the areas of science, technology and engineering education through bias or gender stereotyping, they are also lacking "equal opportunity to full employment and decent work."
- The continued violence against women and girls is an enormous barrier to equal opportunity and must be addressed. When women and girls fear for their lives if they attempt to go to school, then they will not attend.
- When deliberating the issue of equality of pay and gender discrimination in the workplace, it should be noted that these are two important issues that, if ignored, will stymie the advancement of the status of women everywhere and impede their empowerment.
- The idea that biological gender differences are what keep women out of the fields of science, technology and engineering must be seen as what it is—merely justification for the exclusion of women and girls from these educational fields.
- Women must be part of the policy making decisions so that they may help to structure a non-biased, gender equal educational system.

Although progress has been made, the need for laws providing for the inclusion of women and girls in education and training for employment is still a factor. Many women's groups around the world have called for increased emphasis on the need to bring women into the mainstream of science, technology and engineering education. If women are ever to achieve true empowerment, they must be free to pursue whatever avenue they choose to accomplish their goals. As it stands now, many girls all around the world do not have educational goals because they know that those paths are closed to them.

Respectfully submitted,

Dianne Curtis  
President, Zonta International