

**IOGT International Written Statement to
59th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women**

23.10.14

Priority Theme:

The review of progress made in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, 20 years after its adoption at the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995

Dear Chair, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen

In our more than 160-years long history of service in communities around the world, gender equality and women empowerment has been a crucial focus for IOGT International. It's this perspective and understanding that makes us both hopeful and concerned. We are hopeful because we've seen considerable progress and vast achievements in gender equality and women empowerment. We are concerned because we also face major challenges not only to the advances made but to the health and well being of women and girls in general.

Twenty years ago, the global community came together and governments expressed their determination "to advance the goals of equality, development and peace for all women everywhere in the interest of all humanity," but while progress has been made, the potential for sustainable and transformative change has largely been untapped.

Current challenges that affect the implementation of the Platform for Action, as well as opportunities for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women in the post-2015 development agenda are three global epidemics: Non-communicable diseases, HIV/ Aids, and Gender-based violence.

These three global epidemics are disproportionately burdening women and girls, especially women from low- and middle-income countries and they have one common, and dangerous risk factor: alcohol use.

Alcohol is one of four major risk factors in the global epidemic that are non-communicable diseases. NCDs are the leading cause of death globally. A staggering 35 million people die every year from NCDs, of which 18 million are women. NCDs represent the biggest threat to

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women's health worldwide, increasingly impacting on women in developing countries in their most productive years

Alcohol is also a risk factor in the global epidemic that is gender-based violence. Every third woman is subjected to violence at least once during her lifetime. In some parts of the world gender-based violence can be related to alcohol in up to 80% of the cases. And alcohol marketing that sexualizes and de-humanizes women plays its inexcusable role in perpetuating a culture of objectification of women.

Alcohol is a risk factor for HIV/ Aids because it increases the likelihood to engage in risky sexual behavior – like unprotected sex, frequent change of partners or violent sex. Alcohol weakens the immune system making the organism more susceptible for the HI-Virus and it makes adherence to medication for people who are HIV-positive more problematic. In many aspects of the HIV/ Aids epidemic, women are disproportionately burdened.

This brief look at the most basic evidence shows that these three epidemics unfold a triple blow for women's equality and empowerment in the 21st century. As more and more girls and women benefit from advances in gender equality and equal opportunity, these strides are being jeopardized.

IOGT International notes the stance taken by the global community twenty years ago to "take all necessary measures to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and the girl child and remove obstacles to gender equality..." and to be determined in their efforts "to advance the goals of equality, development and peace for all women everywhere..."

Today we know better than ever that alcohol is an obstacle to the achievement of these important goals. Alcohol-related harm reaches deep into the lives of the world's women.

It is with this on mind that we wish to encourage and support the world's governments to apply the tools of high-impact and cost-effective alcohol policy in our common efforts for the advancement and empowerment of women. Alcohol policy measures, such as the Three Best Buys of alcohol policy as described by World Bank, World Health Organization and World Economic Forum (among others), are crucial tools for the achievement of the goals outlined by the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

Box 128 25
SE-111 50 Stockholm
Sweden


T: +46 721 555 036
info@iogt.org
www.iogt.org

Official Statement
Kristina Sperkova
International President

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Who else, if not the women and girls of our world – faced with these epidemics that burden them disproportionately and having been exposed to oppression for centuries – who else deserves it more that the global community resolves to employ all evidence-based tools at their disposal in order to facilitate transformative and sustainable change. Alcohol policy measures can help bring that change for women and girls.



Kristina Sperkova
International President

IOGT International,

Stockholm, 23 October 2014