



**Written statement
submitted by
the Most Reverend Michael Bruce Curry¹,
Presiding Bishop and Primate of The Episcopal Church²
to the 64th session
of the
United Nations Commission on the Status of Women**

**March 9th – 20th, 2020
“Review and appraisal of the implementation of the
Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action”**

The Episcopal Church, known at the United Nations as the “Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America”, is a Christian denomination of two million members in more than 15 countries and a province of the Anglican Communion. As Christians, we believe that God created all humans equally in God’s image and worthy of dignity, adequate resources, love, liberty, and a life-giving relationship with God and creation. Our scriptures, Jesus’ way of love, and our baptismal covenant call us to love one another and to seek and serve Christ in all persons. Our Christian hope is to transform unjust systems of oppression, challenge violence, and pursue peace and reconciliation. Responding to the gospel’s good news and God’s abundant grace and love, we affirm the call to uplift women and girls, noting their diversity, honoring our forerunners, and welcoming the next generation.

These Christian values are the reason the Episcopal Church has affirmed United Nations international conventions, agreements, and declarations that call for just and equal treatment of women and girls³, including the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and Agenda 2030. Episcopalians have accompanied the United Nations before, during and since Beijing in 1995, gathering, praying, studying, publishing, and advocating for gender equality and justice. The Episcopal Church supports women and girls through its mission, programs⁴, resolutions, and advocacy by congregations, dioceses, schools, agencies, and networks. Episcopalians have participated in United Nations meetings, including the Third and Fourth World Conferences on Women, and annually at the Commission on the Status of Women with Anglican Communion and other civil society partners.

While joyfully celebrating the progress for and by women and girls since the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, we sorrowfully protest the lack of progress in some areas over these past 25 years.

¹ The Most Reverend Michael Bruce Curry is the Presiding Bishop and Primate of The Episcopal Church. He submits this statement as the Church’s spokesperson charged by its Church’s *Canons and Constitutions* to “speak God’s words to the Church and to the world, as the representative of this Church and its episcopate in its corporate capacity” (*Canons and Constitutions of The Episcopal Church*, 2015. Title I, Canon 2, Sec. 4 (a)(2).)

² The Episcopal Church is incorporated by the State of New York as “The Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America.”

³ GC 2018-A039: Affirm the Work of The Episcopal Church at the United Nations; GC 2015-A020: Urge Episcopalians to Support the UN and Be Informed of the Church’s Consultative Status; 2015-D07: Ratify UN Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities; 1994-C024: Call for Ratification of UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, etc.

⁴ GC 2012-A076: Recognize Mission and Work in Small Congregations.



First, we must prioritize resources and programs for marginalized women and girls. Episcopalians embraced the values to “leave no one behind” and “reach the furthest behind first” when the Episcopal Church affirmed *Agenda 2030* in 2016⁵. As Christ followers, our call to uplift the marginalized is simultaneously ancient, modern, and urgent. We recognize and lament the disproportionate suffering of women of color; rural women; indigenous women⁶; women with disabilities⁷; women who are discriminated against based on their ethnicity, race, caste, descent⁸, language, religion, sexual orientation or gender identity/expression⁹; migrants, refugees, internally displaced, undocumented or stateless women; enslaved, trafficked or incarcerated women; unemployed women; women whose work is considered immoral, illegal or unacceptable; older and ageing women; widows; and women heads of households. Their human rights often lag behind broader social goals, resource allocation, and programming. Consequently, they are perpetually disadvantaged, marginalized, discriminated against, displaced, neglected, and excluded, increasing their susceptibility to poverty. Intersectionalities of race, class, ethnicity, and gender exacerbate these challenges. When human made constructs create systematic barriers to people reaching their potential hopes and dreams, we all lose. Reaching the furthest behind first means prioritizing resources, services, social protections, and infrastructure for their inclusion.

Second, we must address climate change and environmental concerns. Women and girls (and all of society) depend on and benefit from their land, environment, and natural resources for their basic survival, development, and production. They are and will continue to be gravely affected by climate-induced disruptions. They also are vulnerable to harmful environmental practices, such as exploitation, over-development, mining, drilling, pollution, carbon consumption, and emissions, leading to food insecurity, migrations, and displacements.

Third, we must eradicate violence against women and girls. In 2015, our church noted it “deeply regret[ted] the lack of progress in stemming the global pandemic of violence against women” and requested that its clergy and congregations “speak out...to transform the unjust silence of society in the face of this widespread practice of violence”¹⁰. We decry the pervasive epidemic of gender discrimination and violence, including sexual exploitation and sexual violence; intimate partner violence¹¹; physical assault; rape; psychological, physical, and sexual abuse; harassment¹², bullying, cyber-bullying, and online victimization; cultural stereotyping, objectification, and trivialization; human trafficking; and violence as a tactic of war. In 2015, our Church commended “giving priority to the achievement of gender equality and empowerment of all women, including transgender individuals”¹³. Gender equality will only be achieved when all members of society understand its social, economic, and political benefits through culturally contextualized gender-quality education that includes men and boys, identifies root causes of gender

⁵ EXC102016.30: Support for U.N. Sustainable Development Goals.

⁶ GC 2012-A131: Express Solidarity with Indigenous Peoples.

⁷ GC 2018-D090: Engaging the Church in Advocacy for Disability Rights

⁸ GC 2000-D024: Calls on U.S. Government to Condemn All Forms of Caste based Discrimination; GC 2015-A049: Prioritize Gender Equality Concerns in Foreign and Church Aid; GC 2012-A016: Affirm the Moral Responsibility to Protect Populations from Atrocities.

⁹ GC 2018-C022: Supporting Transgender Access

¹⁰ GC 2015-D054: Refer a Resolution on Violence Against Women

¹¹ GC 2018-D031: Recognizing and Ending Domestic Violence in our Congregations

¹² GC 2018-D017: Reducing Sexual Harassment, Assault and Exploitation in the Workplace

¹³ GC 2015-A049: Prioritize Gender Equality Concerns in Foreign and Church Aid



discrimination, such as cultural traditions, harmful religious beliefs, sexism, machismo, and patriarchy, and the consequential diminishing of the full dignity of women and girls.

Fourth, we must increase access to resources, public services, social protections, and infrastructure where these are inaccessible, expensive, insufficient, non-existent, or unsafe. Education for girls may be expensive, undervalued, or unsafe – reducing girls’ prospects for advancement, employment, and economic well-being. Insufficient digital connectivity diminishes opportunities for communication, education, social support, and professional opportunities. Women are less likely to access pensions or savings through informal, part time, or unpaid work. They often require childcare and family support services. Inadequate infrastructure hampers access to housing, water, sanitation, food, healthcare, education, social protections, and family services. Accessibility must be guaranteed for women and girls with disabilities¹⁴ and transgender persons¹⁵. Healthcare may be under-financed, inaccessible, or unaffordable without universal health coverage or access to employers’ benefits. Women with disabilities, with diseases such as HIV/AIDS, undocumented migrants and refugees, and ethnic minorities might be denied or withheld medical care. Cultural, religious, and societal beliefs threaten to roll back women’s rights and deny them their autonomy to participate in choices related to their bodies and their sexual and reproductive health.

Finally, we must increase access to economic and political power and decision-making. Barriers to women’s leadership and advancement persist in socioeconomic, political, commercial, academic, and religious realms of power and decision-making. Patriarchal legal and economic systems hamper women’s autonomy around land tenure, property and business ownership rights, commercial dealings, and contracts. Women seeking access to decision-making or professional advancement are stymied by financial barriers and insufficient social services. Women’s work contributions are under-reported, undervalued, and under-recognized. Women may not earn enough for a living wage and often are remunerated less than men for equal work. Women also encounter cultural, political, and financial barriers to promotions, management and leadership roles, executive and ownership positions, and to self-representation at work. The resulting gender gaps mean that women must work harder to effectively represent themselves and their interests. Fewer role models exist to encourage their advancement.

We urge member states, United Nations entities, and civil society to:

- Implement special measures, such as preferential financing, resource allocation, and programming to include marginalized groups of women and girls, extend accessibility through contextually appropriate resources and services, and promote awareness campaigns affirming their human rights.
- Urgently reduce carbon emissions in line with the Paris Agreement, invest in and promote clean energy, achieve carbon neutrality, and eradicate harmful environmental practices.
- Promote gender equality education for all, including men and boys; continue multi-stakeholder collaborations to eradicate gender violence; strengthen financial, legal, and judicial protections for victims of violence; and universally ratify and implement the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women¹⁶.

¹⁴ GC 2018-D090: Engaging the Church in Advocacy for Disability Rights

¹⁵ GC 2018-C022: Supporting Transgender Access

¹⁶ GC 1991-A091: Endorse United Nations' Statement on Discrimination Against Women

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- Provide family and social protections, including parental leave, childcare, caretaking, support for single-family households, viable social security systems¹⁷, full-term girls' education, sustainable infrastructure, and equal access to health care¹⁸, including maternal¹⁹ and infant health and sexual and reproductive health.
- Align national laws and policies to facilitate women's ownership of land, property, and businesses; recognize women as contractual parties and participants in financial and commercial transactions; raise awareness of work contributions by women in the informal economy; ensure a living wage for their work; promote equal pay for equal work; extend health care and socioeconomic employment benefits, including parental leave, childcare, and support for single-family households; support women's professional advancement and leadership development, women's organizations and trade unions; and encourage temporary special measures, quotas, direct appointments, and other means to achieve gender equity in advancement, appointments, and promotions.

Twenty-five years after the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, we must continually advocate for meaningful change and equity for all, especially the marginalized. The Episcopal Church, as a faith-based organization, commends women and girls on their achievements, thanks the United Nations, member states, and civil society for their progress, and urges all to close gender gaps and uphold human rights, gender justice, and equality, which ultimately benefit all.

¹⁷ GC 2018-C041: Repair America's Safety Net

¹⁸ GC 2018-D032: Equal Access to Health Care Regardless of Gender

¹⁹ GC 2018-D014: Addressing Maternal Mortality