

**31<sup>st</sup> Session of the Human Rights Council**  
**Joint Statement to Mark International Women's Day**

**Geneva, 8 March 2016**

Mr. President,

I am honoured to deliver this statement to mark International Women's Day on behalf of [Canada, X, Y, Z].

Today, we celebrate the many achievements of women and girls around the world, and reflect on the challenges that remain.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development commits us to achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls by 2030. We pledged to break the cycle of human rights violations and abuses, violence, and discrimination that plague women and girls around the world. There are concrete steps that need to be taken to get us to this goal.

Empowerment is about more than breaking barriers. Empowerment is about recognizing that when women and girls, men and boys enjoy equal rights and opportunities and have a voice, society benefits as a whole.

Empowerment means full and effective political participation: more women voting, seeking office, taking leadership roles, and participating meaningfully in spaces where they can shape public policy and decision making.

It means quality education and decent jobs – in all professions, and equal pay. It means making informed decisions about one's own life. It also means recognizing the importance of unpaid work in the home, in caring for children, the elderly and other dependent family members, and in communities. And it means achieving an equal distribution of this work between men and women.

Empowering women to participate fully in economic life across all sectors is essential to building stronger economies, achieving internationally agreed goals for development and sustainability, and improving the quality of life for women, men, families and communities.

As we face the consequences of devastating humanitarian crises and conflicts around the world, we need more women in all aspects of conflict prevention and resolution, peacekeeping and peacebuilding—Not as token participants, but as meaningful contributors and leaders. This is not just because this is the right thing to do; it is the

strategic thing to do. The data is clear: when women – 50% of the population – are included in a peace process, the likelihood of the agreement lasting increases. If we want to end the cycle of conflict and build sustainable peace, it is essential that women be at the table.

On this International Women's Day, we pay tribute to women and girls who put their own safety at risk to defend human rights and work towards peace and security. They face adversity with courage and determination, which continues to inspire us in our commitment to achieve gender equality by 2030.