

**Outcome Statement
of the 33rd Governing Council Meeting of the Community of Democracies
Virtual Meeting 20 – 21 April 2021**

Since its founding in 2000, the Community of Democracies has affirmed and maintained a commitment to women's full participation in all aspects of democratic governance and sustainable development. The integral role performed by the Working Group on Women and Democracy has further advanced this commitment.

The importance of women's participation in public life as a crucial component of strengthening and consolidating democratic institutions and sustained economic growth was outlined and recognized as a core value in the founding document of the Community of Democracies, the Warsaw Declaration, which emphasizes that the "informed participation by all elements of society, men and women, in a country's economic and political life, including by persons belonging to minority groups, is fundamental to a vibrant and durable democracy." These principles were reiterated in the Bucharest Statement of the Governing Council, adopted in June 2020 at the 20th Anniversary Conference of the Community of Democracies, which underscores, *inter alia*, the importance of maximizing inclusive joint efforts, including full and meaningful participation of women and youth in decision making.

We, the Community of Democracies Governing Council Member States, recognize the 1994 Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), the 1995 Beijing Declaration and its Platform for Action and the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as a global framework that can help countries work toward global peace and prosperity. While there has been some progress in achieving Sustainable Development Goal 5 on gender equality, it is clear that far more needs to be done to advance women's full, equal and meaningful participation in all spheres of public life, because the full participation of women and girls is essential to addressing global inequality and advancing economic growth and development.

We, the Community of Democracies Governing Council Member States, recognize that the Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security, adopted unanimously by the UN Security Council (UNSC) in October 2000, and the subsequent UNSC resolutions on Women, Peace and Security, reflect democratic principles of inclusion by calling for women's full and meaningful participation in peace and security-related decision-making processes, the safety of all women and girls, and equal access to relief and recovery resources, as critical to effective conflict prevention and resolution.

Democratic institutions flourish when all groups of society are represented. The full, equal and meaningful participation and representation of all women and girls, including those from traditionally marginalized and non-elite groups, is crucial for democracy; their leadership and inclusion in decision-making at all levels contributes to strengthening government accountability and transparency.

Women and girls make vital contributions to conflict prevention, conflict resolution and peacebuilding at the community, national and international level, and their meaningful participation in peace negotiations result in more sustainable peace agreements. Yet, women and girls are often excluded from formal peace, political, and security processes, and face increased discrimination, violence and political exclusion during conflict. Their participation must be promoted at all times.

Women make enormous contributions to economies, whether in businesses, in essential fields such as agriculture, health care, and education, or as entrepreneurs or employees. However, women's employment rates and earnings are lower than men's; women are disproportionately represented in lower-wage, insecure employment, including in the informal economy; and have less access to social protection and labor law protections that most often cover those working in the formal economy. In addition, women and girls perform a disproportionate share of unpaid care and domestic work, significantly constraining women's and girls' access to education and training and limiting

women's ability to participate in decision-making processes; occupy leadership positions; and enter, re-enter, or advance in the paid labor market and entrepreneurial endeavors.

Throughout the past year, new challenges and barriers to women's economic and political participation, including online, and gender equality have arisen. Across every sphere, from healthcare including access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights in accordance with the Programme of Action of the ICPD and the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences, to economic participation and the gender digital divide, and from gender-based violence to security and social protection, the impacts of COVID-19 have disproportionately impacted women and girls. At the same time, the pandemic has demonstrated the critical role of all women, who are at the forefront of COVID-19 prevention, response, and recovery efforts.

Women are harder hit by the economic impacts of COVID-19, as they are disproportionately employed in the informal economy and in economic sectors negatively affected by the pandemic and may lack access to institutional and social protection resources. However, while women make up 70 per cent of health sector workers, only 24.7 per cent of the world's health ministers are women. The pandemic has also led to a steep increase in violence against women and girls, including domestic violence, as a consequence of long-term confinement, as well as an increase in unintended pregnancies and child marriage. At the same time, many women have been serving bravely on the frontlines of democratic, environmental and social justice movements since the start of the pandemic – calling for racial justice, climate action, and reproductive healthcare services access, among other issues. Improved health outcomes empower women and girls so that they can realize their full potential and help drive social and economic development.

The pandemic has contributed to decreasing educational opportunities for all women and girls. Enabling the progressive realization of the right to education is one of the most effective ways to promote gender equality, including in public life; girls' education strengthens economies and reduces inequality.

The pandemic is having negative and profound impacts on the inclusion of women in political spaces and has provided an added impetus to act collectively and to support the full empowerment and equal meaningful participation of women at all levels of political and public life. To promote equitable and meaningful participation of all women in an increasingly digital world and to contribute to their social, economic, and political empowerment, it is essential to promote digital inclusiveness.

In many countries, women have played a critical role in responding to COVID-19 by establishing effective virus containment policies and preparing for a more equitable recovery. Ensuring women's full and meaningful participation and representation in all COVID-19 response and recovery efforts, from planning and decision-making to execution, is essential to tackling the above-mentioned socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 on all women and girls.

Promoting adherence to democratic principles can advance gender equality by fostering more inclusive, representative and accountable democratic processes and institutions. When all women and girls have a voice in political decision-making, policies and programs can be better designed to address the needs of all people. Women's leadership can help break down the barriers that prevent women and girls from succeeding and can help create more equal societies.

The principles of gender equality and non-discrimination form two of the major global commitments in the pursuit of peaceful, inclusive, democratic societies and sustainable development. The Community of Democracies supports this year's efforts realized through the UN Commission on the Status of Women, with a focus on women's full, effective and meaningful participation and decision-making in public life, including the elimination of violence, in digital contexts, and the Generation Equality Forum.

In line with Warsaw Declaration principle 19, we, the Community of Democracies Governing Council Member States, strongly affirm that promoting the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all women and girls, both offline and online, as well as the systematic

integration of a gender perspective across all sectors of government and society is essential for advancing democracy globally.