International Association of Economic and Social Councils and Similar Institutions
(AICESIS)

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Statement by the International Association of Economic and Social Councils and Similar Institutions (AICESIS), delivered by Mrs Paola Manacorda Member of the Italian National Council for Economics and Labor (CNEL)

1. My name is Paola Manacorda. I am a member of the Italian Economic and Social Council (CNEL) and I am speaking on behalf of the International Association of Economic and Social Councils and Similar Institutions AICESIS created 10 years ago by 27 countries which today includes more than 56 institutions from Africa, Latin America, Asia and Europe, plus 8 new membership applications. The principal goals of AICESIS are to promote dialogue, exchange experiences and best practices between members, promote the establishment of Economic and Councils in the world, enhance the practice of social consensus through social dialogue and participative governance in order to reconcile economic development, environmental sustainability and social equity. The members of AICESIS are autonomous advisory assemblies with national competences made up of organizations representing "social partners" (employers, trade unions) and other components of civil society (farmers, craftsmen, NGOs, independent experts, etc.) constituting the representation of economic and social interests.

2. Moving in the direction shown by Resolution no. 2009/15 of the Economic and Social Council, the 55th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women gives us an important opportunity to reflect on women's and girls' access to and participation in education, with special reference to scientific education, and also to assess the relative impact on job levels and on so-called decent work.
We know that education is a driver of economic growth and social change and its importance in achieving gender equality is universally acknowledged. Despite this fact, in 2007 72 million children in the world did not have access to primary education, 54% of whom girls. In the same way, 54% of 71 million adolescents that did not attend secondary schools were girls.[2]
Science, technology and innovation not only improve productivity and competitiveness, contributing to economic growth, but also, if used correctly, can help to **fight against** poverty, protect human health and the environment and aid food security. Some major nations have understood this important message and are taking due action.

3. Many countries, among them China, Brazil and India, are acquainted for this opportunities, so they devoted big resources to research and scientific development and to scientific and technical education for young people.

[1] UNESCO, *Reaching the Marginalized*, Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2010.
[2] UNESCO, cit.

[redacted] scientific education. The result of these efforts is an increase of GDP and of new products in sectors like biotechnologies, medicine, electronics, automotive, space, pharmaceutical [redacted] economic growth.

The same can't be told for Europe, where the percentage of public spending for education is less than 10% and the continuous cuts to the public spending in education has affected mainly the science-based faculties.

[redacted] women is hardly affected by this declining trend.

The state of school education is reflected in an economy that continues to take on a [redacted] workers. In [redacted] the female participation rate and relative employment rate are systematically lower than for men: in 2009 the average percentage of women employed in the main countries of Mediterranean Europe was approximately **53%**, compared with 71. % for men.[3]

[redacted] concentrated in micro and small enterprises, with many operating in the informal economy. The extent to which these enterprises are able to develop, acquire or apply technology depends on the availability of qualified human resources, good infrastructures and the general regulatory context.

In Italy, Greece, and even in really innovative enterprises, there is still a *gender pay-gap*, while reconciling professional and family life is still not a priority in political agendas.

Furthermore, as a result of the financial and economic crisis between 2008 and 2009 [redacted] the female unemployment rate was greater than that for men in some regions: Southern Asia (8% vis-à-vis 7.5%), Latin America and the Caribbean (10.1% vis-à-vis 6.9%), the Middle East and North Africa (15% vis-à-vis 8.1%), and developed economies (8.6% vis-à-vis 8.2%)[4]

[redacted] while many efforts have been made at an international level to show that science, technology, and innovation are closely linked to the **issue** of gender equality, the two [redacted] continued to be perceived as separate problems.

It should rather be considered that an essential role of education, and scientific education in particular, is its ability to increase not only the possibility of obtaining decent work but also democratic participation, and contribute to human development, allowing individuals – both men and women – to take informed decisions on critical aspects of their life, including their health. To achieve this goal, it is obviously necessary to first raise the participation of girls in primary and secondary school education. It may be particularly important in this sense to increase the number of primary school teachers having a scientific background, as these are the first to introduce science to children. Compared with boys, girls would appear to be less attracted (according to some empirical researches) to scientific studies, and thus to technological professions. Progress has been made in this respect, in "higher education", with women now taking part in some specific sectors of science, in particular in Life Sciences. Despite everything, women continue to be under-represented in the areas of **information technology** and engineering. Comparing the

[3] Eurostat, 2010.
[4] ILO, Women in Labour Market, 2009.

data available for 121 countries it may be seen, for instance, that women make up 29% of researchers, while only 15% of countries have attained gender equality.[5] In order to help girls develop a greater familiarity with science and technology, and arouse their interest in related topics, **as well as** eradicate the stereotypes still beleaguering society, these issues need to be put forcefully to the attention of primary actors, such as Governments and Parliaments, Universities and research centers, social partners.

5. Economic and Social Councils and Similar Institutions, as bodies institutionally delegated to foster dialogue among social partners and as advisory bodies of Governments and Parliaments, can play an important role in raising an awareness among Governments and Parliaments, suggesting measures such as:

a. **Devote** adequate public financing **to** scientific and technological training programs, extended to the early years of life, as long as possible, in order to build up a critical mass of scientists and technologists that can conduct basic research and implement productive applications in many different sectors, **also using** long-life learning initiatives, necessary due to the rapid obsolescence of technical and scientific knowledge.
b. **Suggest** specific programs to ensure that women have fair access to scientific and technological training, and **promote** awareness-building actions, also through the mass media, to encourage women to pursue scientific careers.
c. **Get** scientific organizations to guarantee gender equilibrium when selecting for positions of responsibility, and **take** women's needs into account when organizing research work, **as well as ensure** that research contents and methods take into account the needs and interests of women.
d. **Suggest that high visibility** be devoted to women scientists, also **promoting** their **visits** in secondary schools.
e. **Stress** the need for the female component to be highlighted in statistics on scientific research, innovation and employment.

As far as dialogue among social partners is concerned, ESC or similar Institutions **can contribute through**:

f. Carefully monitor the placement and career promotion of women in scientific circles, disseminating and promoting best practices.
g. **Push** high-technologies companies to hire and turn to account the contribution of women, also with reference to the elimination of any pay-gap.
h. Assess, through statistical data and empirical researches, the effect of the adequate technical-scientific training of women on their employability and **current** employment.
i. Jointly promote specific projects reconciling professional and family life, taking into account the commitment needed to perform scientific and technological work.
j. Support the creation of female entrepreneurship in the scientific and technical sectors, tapping into local resources having a scientific background, so that women can become an increasingly important part of the business world.

[5] UNESCO and UNESCO Institute for Statistics, *A global perspective on research and development*, UIS Fact Sheet, no. 2, Montreal, October 2009.