

**IOGT International Written Statement to  
61<sup>st</sup> Session of the Commission on the Status of Women**

**16.10.16**

*Priority Theme:*

*Women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work*

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Dear Excellencies,

In 2016, IOGT International celebrated its 165th anniversary. In our now 165-year long history of service in communities around the world, gender equality and women empowerment have always been a crucial focus for us. 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 face major challenges not only to the advances made but to the health and well being of women and girls in general.

In September 2015, world leaders adopted 17 Sustainable Development Goals, including SDG5 "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls." The Agenda2030 is a remarkable achievement. But envisioning its realization through the lens of women and girls, we clearly see massive obstacles looming. Alcohol harm is a cross-cutting obstacle for achieving the SGDs, as it negatively impacts 12 out of 17

goals, including SDG5. Alcohol harm places a tremendous burden on women and girls, their health, their economic empowerment and their rights.

Going forward, it is therefore of utmost importance for the global community to address alcohol harm with the evidence-based, high-impact and cost-effective measures that we do have at our disposal. Women's economic empowerment is threatened and hindered by three major global epidemics: Non-communicable diseases, TB and HIV/ Aids, and Gender-based violence.

These three global epidemics are disproportionately burdening women and girls, especially women in low- and middle-income countries and they have one common 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 women's health worldwide, increasingly burdening women from developing countries in their most productive years - clearly an issue of concern in terms of women's economic empowerment.

Secondly, alcohol is also a risk factor in the global epidemic of gender-based violence. In some parts of the world, gender-based violence can be related to alcohol in up to

80% of the cases. And alcohol marketing plays a role in perpetuating prejudices and stereotypes of women; alcohol marketing often de-humanizes, sexualized and objectifies them. Alcohol marketing fuels gender-based violence and erodes women empowerment.

Thirdly, alcohol is a risk factor for Tuberculosis and HIV/ Aids. 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 it more susceptible for the HI-Virus and it makes adherence to medication for people who are HIV-positive more difficult. In many aspects of the HIV/ Aids epidemic, women are disproportionately burdened.

Simply put: alcohol harm is a Women's Rights issue. Alcohol harm is a threat to women's economic empowerment.

That's the reality in which the discussion of women's economic empowerment needs to be rooted. This reality highlights the urgent need to apply the tools of high-impact and cost-effective alcohol policy in our joint efforts for women's economic empowerment. 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), can help foster transformative change for women and girls.

Alcohol policy measures such as alcohol taxation can play a powerful role in helping to end discrimination, to eliminate gender-based violence, and to strengthen sound policies comprehensively promoting gender equality and women empowerment. We have the evidence. We have the policy tools. Now we need political will and leadership to create the momentum that the Agenda2030 needs and that women and girls deserve.



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