



## Economic and Social Council

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### Commission on the Status of Women

#### Fifty-eighth session

10-21 March 2014

**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”: implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives**

### **Statement submitted by Royal Academy of Science International Trust, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council**

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.



## **Statement**

### **Why are we still worried about women in science?**

Interest in the question of women in science remains 15 years after the organization Women in Science International League was founded.

Why has the question of women in science not been resolved after years of debate and the investment of thousands of dollars in programmes encouraging women and girl students to enter science? What is the evidence for discrimination in academia, when many more women now earn degrees in science and engineering compared with 15 years ago?

Over the past years, the overall percentage of women receiving degrees in science, technology, engineering and mathematics has increased dramatically. This growth tends to mask at least three other aspects of the demographics of the science and technology workforce.

In the United States of America, for example, and according to the National Science Foundation, women now earn more bachelor's degrees and master's degrees than men.

However, the aggregated data mask the fact that, although their grades and other academic accomplishments are equal to or surpass those of men who remain in science fields, more women than men leave science soon after they begin academic employment. They do so because certain obstacles prevent them from remaining in the field or from reaching their full potential as professionals in academia. Some of these barriers are new, but the issues from 30 or 40 years ago remain, appearing today in somewhat different language, behaviours and structures.

### **Why do women exit the science fields' workforce? [[H2]]**

We raised a question in 2001 and it still remains: why do women exit the science fields' workforce? The answer is almost the same in almost all countries.

In fact, the answer is not genetic or due to a lack of interest. Collective studies have showed that women outperform men academically, receive more awards and have higher graduation rates and better attitudes toward education. Interviews, case studies and statistical research consistently suggest that two primary factors stand out among the multiple forces that push women to leave the science workforce: the need to balance career and family and a lack of professional networks.

Women's biological clocks often mean that decisions about marriage and children cannot be delayed until after their careers have been well established. Dozens of studies document the struggle to balance career and family as the most significant challenge facing their professional advancement.

Another major factor for women leaving science results from lack of networking and mentoring. Studies revealed that women scientists might have less diverse networks. In addition, women faculty report fewer referrals from collegial networks to participate in the commercial marketplace by being asked to consult, serve on science advisory boards and interact with industry.

Attracting women to the science workforce and high-tech entrepreneurship and then retaining them will require changing the culture of science to make it more family-friendly and inviting.

For 15 years, we succeeded in attracting more women into science, for the benefit of women and science and society in general, and will continue this tradition of measureless services with an infinitive vision into the future.

There is a lot to be done and only together we can a make a difference.

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