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**Statement from Engender, Scotland, to the CEDAW Committee on 22 October 2012**

The period since the last examination of the UK by CEDAW Committee has seen a clear and stark diminishing of women's rights across the four nations of the United Kingdom.

It is women who have borne the brunt of the impact of the austerity measures that have been the UK Government's response to the financial crisis and recession. It is women who have seen a withdrawal of essential public services, including refuges and support services. It is low-paid women and lone-parents who are shouldering the cost of "welfare reforms" that will push people further into poverty and homelessness. It is women's jobs that have been lost and will be lost as the UK Government relentlessly shrinks the public sector. It is women's lives and experience that are missing from the analysis as the UK Government sets its economic policy.

The complexities of the UK's constitutional arrangements are beyond the scope of this statement, but the Committee should be aware that Scotland has separate and distinct judicial, education, and health systems from the rest of the UK; part of the devolution settlement that established the Scottish Parliament and Scottish Government in 1999. The effect of UK Government policy on women in Scotland is significant, and some important institutions and mechanisms exist at UK level, but there are also policy areas for which the Scottish Government must be held accountable. The questions paper that Engender has submitted to the Committee delineates these issues, and I will highlight those matters that most concern us now.

Across the UK, women's organisations have been alarmed by the dismantling of the architecture that carried women's voices, and the realities of women's lives, to Government. The closing of the Women's National Commission was followed by arguably more serious undermining of the statutory equalities body in Great Britain, the Equality and Human Rights Commission. This organisation's budget was slashed by 60 per cent and its purpose and remit truncated. During a time when the fabric of society is being pulled and stretched by austerity, the Commission is in peril.

The framework of equality law has been destabilised, with the Government moving forward with its plans to repeal enforcement provisions within the Equality Act 2010. The government has signalled its intent to weaken or remove the public sector equality duty. The government's introduction of fees for employment tribunal applicants of £1200, or approximately \$1900 USD, present an obvious and immediate barrier to justice. The Government has recently announced that it will enable employers to buy out employment rights from their staff, including maternity rights, for shares in their employer's company. It has also directed civil service employers to reduce opportunities for flexible working.

This weakening of the law and terms and conditions comes at a time in which there is greater uncertainty in the labour market. Scotland has seen its highest levels of female unemployment in 24 years. Although male-dominated areas of the economy have seen some resurgence, with men back at work on construction sites and in manufacturing, the reductions in the female-dominated public sector will be permanent. This affects women both as workers and as service users.

All this would have been challenging enough had women's pre-recession labour market position been better. In fact, as the Committee is no doubt aware, the UK and Scottish labour markets are both characterised by significant gendered segregation. Women are clustered into those jobs that pay the least, and into the most junior roles. Evidence is clear that this situation is not changing.

The Deputy First Minister of Scotland, speaking at a recent conference on women and work, identified childcare provision as infrastructure. We agree with her and deplore the rising numbers of parents who have given up work because of the cost of childcare. Scotland has the highest childcare costs in Great Britain, and a solution must be found to ease the tension between quality and cost.

Violence against women is a cause and a consequence of women's inequality. Like women across the world, our inequality in Scotland means that in great numbers we experience men's violence, including rape, domestic abuse, female genital mutilation, forced marriage, prostitution and pornography. Scotland's gendered definition of violence against women explicitly links VAW with stark inequalities in political participation, and in economic empowerment. We would urge the CEDAW Committee to task the Scottish and UK Governments with demonstrating these links in their policy and performance.