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STATEMENT FROM BOARD OF DIRECTORS ON WOMEN DELIVER'S TRANSFORMATION

New York, NY, 28 October 2020 – Early this summer, several current and former employees at Women Deliver publicly shared testimonies of racial discrimination, harassment, bias, and a toxic work environment. This came amidst a global reckoning on racial justice, and prompted Women Deliver to reflect on what it is and what it wants to be, have difficult conversations, and begin a journey towards becoming an explicitly anti-racist organization.

The Board would first like to thank all of those who came forward and shared their testimonies, offered recommendations, asked tough questions, and challenged Women Deliver to think deeply about privilege, bias, and power. The organization has been listening, self-educating, reflecting, and struggling with the contradiction that while the organization has sought to advance the cause of gender equality, it has also caused harm to staff and advocates.

On behalf of the organization, the Board deeply and sincerely apologizes to current and former employees, Young Leaders and alumni, and the advocates and organizations with which it partners for harm and pain caused.

The Board of Directors recognizes that it needs to have better systems and structures in place to ensure that concerns such as micro-aggressions, tokenism, and a toxic work culture can never happen again, or if they do, they can be brought to the Board's notice quickly and be appropriately addressed. Therefore, the Board is laying out additional steps to turn the learnings from recent months into action.

While the Board has been examining and addressing the concerns raised by staff and advocates, Women Deliver staff have been working actively in parallel to transform Women Deliver into an anti-racist organization so that its work to create a more gender-equal world will benefit all girls and all women. The staff have been re-examining every facet of the organization through the lens of transformation: from internal systems, structures, and policies to external facing practices, programs, and partnerships. The Board is grateful that all Women Deliver employees have applied their passion, intelligence, and expertise to this vital work.

While the Board regrets that it took a public reckoning for the issues at Women Deliver to be addressed and for transformation to begin, the journey to become an organization where racism has no place is the right thing for Women Deliver, for its staff and partners, and for its mission of creating a more gender-equal world.

INVESTIGATION PROCESS & FINDINGS

Immediately following the public testimonies, the Board of Directors commissioned Cader Adams LLP to conduct an independent investigation into allegations of racial discrimination at Women Deliver. It selected Cader Adams as a Black- and women-owned firm with civil rights and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) experience working with non-profit organizations. The Board recognizes that laws often protect entrenched powers. Therefore, the investigation's mandate was broader than the confines of the law and was designed to look into any wrongdoing, as well as to help the organization better understand the extent of any problem, and how the findings, along with already ongoing transformation efforts could help guide a continued path of change.

Cader Adams LLP interviewed 28 people for one to two hours each. Interviewees consisted of current and former employees, consultants, and two focus groups with Women Deliver Young Leaders and Young Leader alumni.

As part of its review, Cader Adams LLP examined online statements and letters from current and former employees, Young Leaders, earlier reports from DEI and intersectionality experts regarding Women Deliver's workplace policies and culture, an evaluation preparing Women Deliver's new five-year strategic plan; personnel policies; and documents pertaining to Women Deliver's transformation plan and progress.

The report makes several recommendations to improve Women Deliver's work environment while highlighting the many steps already taken to improve its workplace culture and becoming an anti-racist organization.

The report's findings can be reviewed [in full here](#) and our key takeaways are:

1. Seen in context, Women Deliver exists in a society built on systemic racism and colonialism, which has traditionally excluded Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), LGBTQIA+, and other traditionally underrepresented groups from accessing power.
2. Women Deliver has undergone a period of rapid growth, during which its policies and practices lagged behind, which may have potentially left opportunity for bias in implementation.
3. The workplace culture has been too demanding, urgent, and high-pressure.
4. Women Deliver is prepared to address the challenges identified in the report.

PATH FORWARD

As Women Deliver moves forward, it is critical that it reaffirms its mandate as a global gender-equality advocacy organization in order to deliver on its work for and with girls and women in all their diversity around the world. Women Deliver's leading role in the gender equality movement makes it especially critical that it examines how it works across sectors, geographies, issues areas, and levels of power. That includes examining the power dynamics of being located in a high-income country when it needs to partner better with advocates and organizations in low and middle-income countries, and that ensuring staff and leadership are more diverse and centered around the global community we serve. Women Deliver must re-examine its organizational and operating structures in order to achieve that and to deliver on its new five-year strategic plan.

As Women Deliver makes the transformational shifts necessary, the following changes will occur:

Executive Leadership

While the report found that “no one person is the cause of these challenges,” Women Deliver's President/CEO Katja Iversen has decided to make space for new leadership by stepping down, effective 30 October 2020. In her seven-year tenure, she has positioned Women Deliver as a strong advocate, eminent convener, and effective communicator. She has focused on working within and outside the halls of power, with nontraditional sectors and partners, and creating spaces for meaningful and inclusive dialogue. The Board thanks Katja deeply for her tireless work and commitment to Women Deliver's mission. [Link to press release.](#)

In the months to follow, the Board will embark on an inclusive search for a new leader, ideally a person who in addition to being a recognized advocate for girls and women's health and rights, has led an anti-racist organization, is experienced in carrying out the kind of important transformation work that has begun, and has experience living or working in low or middle-income countries. Kathleen Sherwin will continue to fill the role of Interim-CEO until a new President/CEO is identified.

While that search gets underway, the Board supports the current management team and employees of Women Deliver working to move the organization into its next chapter.

Other Employees

Women Deliver has had conversations with all individuals who were named in the testimonies. They will remain at Women Deliver and participate in the transformation and reconciliation processes. Dismantling systemic racism and bias, conscious or unconscious, and creating a positive workplace culture requires investment from all directly associated with the

organization. The systems, structures, and training which the Board and Women Deliver are putting in place will help prevent harm and will hold people accountable in the future.

Governance

- **Create a staff representative position** to represent the voices of all staff at Board meetings.
- Ensure an **open nomination process for Board seats** - and encourage staff, partners, and advocates to nominate candidates.
- Co-develop an approach for regular and structured **dialogue between the Board and employees**.
- Create a Board committee to support the organization's **ongoing transformation and monitor its progress**.
- **Ensure continuing diversity of skills and perspectives on the Board** which may also include expanding the size of the board, continuing an international viewpoint, and bringing in new skills related to expertise in HR, DEI, and organizational transformation.
- Continue the learning of the Board through **investment in training and development related to DEI**, inclusion, and organizational development.
- Develop a **360 approach for the annual CEO evaluation** which would include input from staff and partners and includes metrics tied to the ongoing transformation.

Management

- Encourage employees to **form a council to facilitate a structured dialogue** with management and establish an effective and efficient way of addressing concerns and ensuring staff influence.
- **Improve HR infrastructure** to implement official, consistent, and transparent policies across the entire organization, including reporting for grievances, complaints and concerns.
- Invest in **diversity, equity and inclusion** to foster a culture of respect and ensure that **intersectionality** is a cornerstone of the next five-year strategy and its implementation.
- Support management in creating mechanisms for **transparent and informed decision making**.
- Ensure that financial resources are prioritized for **continued and regular DEI and general management training** for management and leadership.
- Partner with leadership to **examine the appropriate leadership and management structure** to support the next strategic plan.
- Hold leadership and management accountable to **keep workloads manageable and foster employee wellbeing**, while remaining committed to the organization's critical work.

Organization

- Promote diversity at all levels in the organization, **including BIPOC and LGBTQI+ representation** at the leadership and management levels.
- Ensure that staff and leadership reflect the global nature of Women Deliver work and **increase our hiring practices outside the United States.**
- Explore **options for operating outside of North America.**

ROAD AHEAD

The Board wholeheartedly supports the systemic transformation work already underway at Women Deliver, and recognizes and thanks the staff for the huge steps they have already taken. The Board thanks once again all those who came forward and shared their testimonies, offered recommendations, asked tough questions, and challenged the organization to reexamine the role it must all play by becoming an anti-racist organization

In the weeks and months ahead, the Board, leadership, and staff will work together to make sure that there are clear metrics and accountability around the commitments which are being jointly made. As those changes are implemented, Women Deliver expects its employees, partners, and wider community to continue to hold it accountable. Women Deliver in turn will be transparent in its transformation process, approaching each step with humility.

Women Deliver knows that gender equality and racial equality are interconnected and that one cannot be advanced without the other. It looks forward to continuing working with staff, partners, the gender equality community, and girls and women around the world to deliver on its mission of creating a more gender-equal world.