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Statement of Veronika Didusenko

Dear friends, Representatives of many American media were at my press conference yesterday. It's been a week since I left Ukraine. But with every second, every new headline about my homeland, all this time my heart is breaking. The most recent terrible news, in Kharkiv, the Russians killed Юлія Здановська. She was 21 years old. she was a student of Professor Bogdan Rublev, the winner of the European Mathematical Olympiad...and she was my friend. They deprived her of a wonderful future... I want to ask you to hold a minute of silence for Yulia Zdanovskaya, for thousands of Ukrainian civilians who died from Russian bullets, shells, bombs, rockets, and for Ukrainian soldiers who gave their lives defending the freedom not only of Ukraine, but of the whole world.

During our previous meeting with Gloria, three months ago, we discussed plans for the protection of women's rights in a completely different world, without exploding shells and rockets outside the window. It would seem that compared to what has been happening in Ukraine for two weeks now, our plans fade into the background. For the last days I was thinking, perhaps it is worth postponing, but I will not postpone.

Before the first air raid siren resounded in the night sky of Kyiv, each of us had our own dreams, our own plans. But I won't let Putin steal my dream! I have been fighting for the rights of young mothers for many years now, and all the Putins in the world will not be enough to stop me on my way to this goal!

My name is Veronika Didusenko, and I am a fashion model and women's rights activist. In 2018 I was stripped of the Miss Ukraine title for two reasons: The first is that I'm a mother. The second - I had previously been married.

I am infinitely grateful to Gloria Allred for seeing clear discrimination against women around the world in my and Andrea's story, and for supporting us, as she has done *so many times before*, when she has witnessed injustice against women. I was shocked when I came across Andrea's case - yet another example of the discriminatory restrictions enshrined in the rules of the four leading beauty pageants - Miss World, Miss Universe, Miss Earth and Miss International.

Did you know that mothers, women who have lost their children, victims of rape who *still decided to have their child*, women who have *ever* been married and widows are still not allowed to participate in these pageants? In a prosperous liberal Western world, as it turns out, a woman's "worth" is still being determined by her "virtue". We all have the power to challenge and change any rule if it is irrelevant, outdated, or discriminatory. I want these rules to change so that all women who want to enter beauty pageants can freely do so.

I support Andrea Quiroga's legal challenge in California against these outdated entry criteria. She is right to raise a challenge against these discriminatory rules, that put mothers - and women who have been married - at a disadvantage against other women. This lawsuit, and my own against the organizers of Miss Ukraine, is a part of the Right to be a mother global movement for change. This movement I launched to expose the discriminatory restrictions on the rules of the world's four largest beauty pageants. If we are successful, it will set a precedent for all beauty pageants to change their outdated rules and their outdated views on *the role of women in the 21st Century*. This is a unique

opportunity for Miss World America and Miss Ukraine to do the right thing and support women - and mothers - around the world. Together we will continue to fight until all women have these opportunities!!!

Veronika Didusenko

March 9, 2022