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Statement submitted by Fundación para Estudio e Investigación de la Mujer, International Women’s Health Coalition and Women for Women’s Human Rights: New Ways, non-governmental organizations 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

Violence against women and girls: a pending issue worldwide

Gender inequality and the power asymmetry that results in intimate, family and social relationships make women more vulnerable to violence. This is fuelled by socioeconomic and cultural values that promote women's subordination to men in all spheres of interaction: personal, family, community, work, political and in social participation. Discrimination based on gender can interact with other forms of discrimination based on factors such as age, income, education, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic disadvantage or sexual orientation to exacerbate women's social exclusion and marginalization and increase their vulnerability to violence.

Women's empowerment and ability to have control over all aspects of their lives, including their sexuality, is critical in reducing their vulnerability to violence. For women's empowerment to be not only words, real actions must be taken to improve girls', adolescents' and young women's education, including comprehensive sexuality education; ensure equal access to decent work and income to reduce poverty and economic dependence; ensure access to basic health-care and social services and information, including for sexual and reproductive health; support women's and girls' social and political participation and capacity to take and excel in decision-making positions; advance legal reform to deter early and forced marriage and other harmful cultural norms that disproportionately impact women and girls; and promote and protect women's and girls' human rights.

Despite many declarations, regional treaties and good intentions, violence against women and girls continues unabated. Domestic violence, marital rape, incest and other forms of violence within families continue to receive inadequate attention and action by decision makers, law enforcement officials and the judiciary in most countries of the world. Women's access to justice, comprehensive health and psychosocial care and support services, shelter and other forms of protection after they experience violence remains inadequate. In conflict situations, women and girls are especially vulnerable to rape and other forms of sexual violence, which continue to be used as a weapon of war to instil fear in and dominate civilian members of communities, where perpetrators often act with impunity.

All forms of violence, particularly intimate-partner violence and sexual violence in conflict situations, increase women's and girls' vulnerability to HIV infection. Women and girls are biologically more vulnerable to sexual transmission of HIV than men. Their risk of HIV infection is compounded by gender inequality and unequal power relationships, which mean that they are often less able to negotiate condom use or refuse sex, even in intimate relationships, in part because of threats or acts of gender-based violence and coercion.

HIV is not only a consequence of gender-based violence against women and girls, but is also a cause of violence; women living with HIV are particularly vulnerable in this regard and are often the target of stigma and discrimination in their families and communities. The effects of the link between violence against women and HIV continue to threaten the lives of millions of women and girls around the world, yet Governments, multilateral and bilateral agencies and major donors continue to address them separately and insufficiently.

For all these reasons, we can no longer continue to accept complacency in the face of any form of violence against women and girls. The international community must make strong commitments to eradicate all forms of violence against women and girls, including:

(a) Scale up investment and resources for effective programmes for the empowerment of women and girls and the prevention and elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls. This must be a central priority in all areas of the development agenda at the national, regional and global levels;

(b) Develop specific guidelines with recommendations on how to improve education for women and girls and guarantee their access to decent work, income and resources, including property and inheritance rights, as steps to reduce their economic dependence and eliminate violence against women and girls;

(c) Implement global media campaigns that deconstruct violence against women and girls, address the harmful impacts of all forms of violence against women and girls, and challenge gender norms so that violence against women is not perceived as something that is natural or normal;

(d) Establish comprehensive care protocols for women subjected to all forms of violence, including sexual violence, and ensure that they are fully implemented where they exist. This must include legal support for victims, as well as social, health and psychological care and support and appropriate referrals. In particular, women and girls subjected to sexual violence must have access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health-care services, including emergency contraception to prevent pregnancy, post-exposure prophylaxis to prevent HIV infection, diagnosis and treatment of other sexually transmitted infections, and safe abortion services;

(e) Ensure access to justice for women and girls who are victims of violence and guarantee that their legal actions receive support at the national level.
