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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 ActionAid, 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

Violence against women is a global phenomenon which stems from deep-rooted patriarchal gender norms. Widespread urbanization, migration and the rapid growth of cities in recent years, while providing new economic and social opportunities for many women, have also increased the vulnerability of many to exploitation and violence. While both men and women living in poverty in cities and slums face extreme human rights deprivations, the situation of women and girls is exacerbated by their gender. The United Nations Human Settlements Programme Global Assessment on Women's Safety found that the most widespread forms of gender-based violence included partner violence (39 per cent), sexual violence (20 per cent) and violence in public spaces, including public transport (19 per cent). On average, violence makes up at least 25 to 30 per cent of urban crime, and women, especially in developing countries, are twice as likely to be victims of violent aggression and negative attitudes (including domestic violence) than men.

Most women migrate to cities seeking new economic opportunities, often because of a lack of such opportunities in rural areas. Sadly, their dreams of a better life are often shattered when faced with the realities of urban settlements, characterized by mass unemployment, labour in the informal sector, and deprivations, including lack of suitable housing, cramped living conditions, poor water and sanitation facilities and a lack of health care, education and other social protection mechanisms. Poor urban migrants often face regular evictions, displacement and mistreatment by police and officials and can even find themselves criminalized by anti-poor policies and poor urban governance. Although urban economies tend to be dependent on women's labour, women are paid lower wages and are often denied access to credit, resources and income generation and entrepreneurial opportunities. In addition, women are disadvantaged by a range of contributing factors that affect them in different ways to men, including unsafe public spaces and reliance on unsafe public transport, with sexual harassment common; a lack of basic amenities such as toilets and crèches; and lack of voice and influence in political spaces. The feminization of poverty and informal labour subjects women to a life of discrimination, social exclusion and violence and denies them a voice, as well as freedom and dignity.

International human rights treaties affirm that violence against women violates women's rights and fundamental freedoms and recognize that this violence occurs in both private and public spaces. Governments, entrusted with the responsibility of promoting, protecting and fulfilling the rights of women and girls, must take more active measures to address these issues. A 2011 comparative study of Brazil, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Liberia and Nepal by ActionAid International entitled "Women and the city: examining the gender impact of violence and urbanisation" reveals that women are often blamed for the violence they experience by those in positions of authority, particularly the police and judiciary. Few policies, laws and programmes exist to protect women in urban spaces. Generally categorized as a "woman's issue", women's safety has often been excluded from key urban planning and policy agendas. Violence against women is normalized through social values and attitudes that permit — and even support — disrespectful, discriminatory and violent treatment of women, including impunity for perpetrators and a lack of accountability on the part of those with responsibility for women's protection. Incidents of violence are inconsistently reported and monitored and quality gender-

disaggregated data does not exist and therefore cannot be used to inform policies and programmes. All this also creates a sense of fear for poor women and denies them access to opportunities that exist in the city.

When women experience violence or lack of safety it limits:

• Enjoyment of their rights and freedoms as equal citizens to access and enjoy their neighbourhoods and cities.

• Mobility and freedom of movement as they avoid certain places, routes and modes of public transportation.

• Full participation in public life, including political and community life.

• Psychological and psychosocial health and well-being, including their confidence and sense of self-worth and their ability to claim their rights.

• Ability to pursue economic and labour opportunities.

• Educational attainment and participation in student life and movements.

• Ability to control their sexual and reproductive health.

• Access to essential services such as health, water and sanitation services.

All of the above limit women's personal freedoms and their right to enjoy cities as equal citizens. They also deepen and maintain the conditions for urban poverty and limit the achievement of gender equality.

Recommendations

The work of ActionAid on safe cities has shown us that, in order to reduce violence against women and girls in urban spaces, it is vital that the State be held accountable for the promotion, protection and fulfilment of women's and girls' rights. As a result, we firmly believe that addressing gender inequalities and violence against women and girls should be recognized as an integral part of the post-2015 development framework, including through stand-alone goals and indicators. In addition, we call on Governments and the international community to ensure that:

States are made accountable and are undertaking evidence-based urban planning fully mindful of the rights of women and girls by:

• Strengthening research capacity in the field of women's urban safety and conducting research for evidence-based programmes and policies.

• Ensuring systematic and reliable data on violence against women and girls in urban and peri-urban areas is collected, disaggregated, disseminated and made publicly available.

• Ensuring public amenities, including water, sanitation, health care, education and social protection services are available, accessible and affordable to all women and girls, irrespective of their social or economic status and where in the city they live.

• Ensuring all public places, including bus stations, markets, entertainment halls and educational institutions, are planned and designed with the needs and safety of women and girls in mind.

- Investing in monitoring and evaluation in order to measure progress towards women's safety in urban areas.

- Providing training for decision makers and urban planners on women's urban safety and on violence against women.

- Supporting practitioners and researchers in the area of women's urban safety to develop ethical standards for work related to women's urban safety, including conflict-sensitive and "do no harm" approaches.

Legal frameworks and policies are revisited and revised to ensure they fully support the right of women and girls to live free from violence by:

- Strengthening legal instruments to ensure that cultural, traditional and religious practices do not take primacy over or inhibit the realization of the rights of women and girls.

- Ensuring policies and legislation are in place to protect women and girls from violence in public spaces and hold perpetrators to account.

- Ensuring clear and straightforward mechanisms exist to support women and girls to seek redress and justice for violence and that these are easily accessible to poorer women.

- Putting in place laws and policies that ensure women are free from violence in their places of work, are properly remunerated for their work and have access to necessary facilities while at work, including sanitation services that are safe and respect their rights to privacy and dignity.

Systematic and State violations of the rights of women and girls come to an end by:

- Requiring providers of public services, including police and law enforcement, as well as transport providers, to demonstrate an awareness of the rights of women and girls and their responsibility to respect, protect and fulfil those rights.

- Ending State violence and hostility towards migrants, refugees and homeless people.

- Ending the criminalization and marginalization of sex workers, transgender people, lesbian, gay and bisexual people and people living with HIV.

States are actively educating and supporting women and girls to understand and realize their rights by:

- Making available resources for programmes and interventions aimed at the empowerment of women and girls.

- Prioritizing the establishment of services that mitigate the impact of violence against women, in particular sexual and reproductive health and rape and violence support and counselling services.

- Strengthening networks for advocacy and supporting civil society and social movements, particularly through targeted support to women's organizations.

- Ensuring women's participation in planning and the formulation of new laws and policies.

- Ensuring women and girls have access to housing, shelter and security of tenure.

- Finding ways of engaging boys and men as partners in efforts to improve women's safety.

- Raising awareness about women's rights across public services and at the household, community and national levels, including through mass-media campaigns.

States ensure adequate budgets and resources are made available at all levels and the utilization is monitored to ensure that the above plans are integrated well within the State systems.

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