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Statement submitted by Consorcio Boliviano de Juventudes–Casa de la Juventud, 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

The Consorcio Boliviano de Juventudes–Casa de la Juventud has drawn up this report based on its monitoring of the media and of reports produced by the Government, civil society and international aid agencies, in addition to the information it has itself gathered through its human rights activities.

A multinational state inhabited by a number of recognized indigenous, native and peasant groups, with different identities, languages and idiosyncrasies, must by virtue of that fact possess the ability to establish a comprehensive human rights compliance scenario. Therefore, we value the collective efforts that promote respect and protection for girls and women. These, when reflected in a substantial change in the community, are the result of the formulation, promulgation and advocacy of public policies with a broad gender focus. However, there are still pending issues requiring improvement by both components of the State (the people and the government). Violence against women and girls is now reported and acknowledged on the public record, but even though the citizenry are moved by, repudiate and condemn it, there is a need to close the gap in reporting, enforcement and punishment in order to achieve the restoration of rights. Many cases are reported, but very few are finalized. The standard has yet to be made known and effectively applied. In urban centres, the system of protection, care and redress is deficient. However, that deficiency is perceived to be greater in rural municipalities, where one official serves as the sole guardian of rights in a vast territory and must protect girls, boys, women and seniors. This is compounded by the constant staff turnover, which prevents protection offices from becoming fixtures. Together with staff, what is needed is experience, ability, documentation and user confidence. Otherwise we experience a regrettable “Adam complex”: we are always starting over and relearning, but unable to take the next step.

The political context, owing to the political constitution of the State, which guarantees and respects human rights and recognizes international agreements, has facilitated progress in the implementation of social policies and the creation of ties of solidarity that favour mothers and their newborns, as well as incentives to stay in school and promotion of access to maternal and child health. The implementation of sectoral rules such as the law for domestic workers, the law declaring 2012 to be the “Year of Non-violence against Children and Adolescents in the Plurinational State”, and the Law on Legal Protection of Children and Adolescents, show a clear political will to put the issue on the agenda and to promote the integration of positive rights-based changes into the very fabric of the State.

Moreover, economic resources are now sufficient for the purpose. Hence, budgetary transfers to the regions have been increased, strengthening decentralization and regional autonomy. Municipalities, which are strategic neighbourhood-level entities, now have greater resources. The difficulty lies in making the right investments and providing the social sector with the right skills, not just focusing on infrastructure or bureaucracy, which could raise the spectre of corruption.

With appropriate policies and adequate resources, the State should achieve true human development and satisfy the inhabitants, as they will be assured of better opportunities for everyone. However, the reality at community level is quite different, and there is a yawning gap between the law and its enforcement.

- In the city of Oruro 700 cases of violence against children, especially girls, have been reported. These are classified as molestation, alleged rape and sexual harassment in schools. The national figure is up by 80 per cent, and compared to last year twice as many victims were assaulted in their homes.
- In Sucre, 4 to 5 dropouts are recorded every month. The mothers are women in extreme poverty, the main causes being unwanted pregnancies, teenage motherhood and migration. It is estimated that countrywide some 15 children a day are abandoned, 9 being girls.
- The ombudsmen for children and adolescents have recorded 70 cases of school violence (bullying) in state and private schools.
- Moreover, four types of cyberbullying have been identified in Bolivia. Some 23 per cent of the country's students are its victims, particularly girls and adolescent women.
- A study on violence against children in the Plurinational State of Bolivia shows that 6 out of 10 children and adolescents are subject to some form of aggression by their teachers, girls bearing the brunt of it. In 59 per cent of cases, the aggression was physical ill-treatment of girls. In the most common forms of ill-treatment, female students endured caning, slapping, ear-pulling, open-handed blows or even punches.
- According to the School and Adolescent Mental Health Unit of Potosi City, 77 per cent of adolescents suffer ill-treatment abuse within their own family, mainly at the hands of their parents; the incidence of such ill-treatment is as much as 40.2 per cent. In some regions of the country the picture is bleaker still, as 82 per cent of adolescents suffer physical and psychological ill-treatment at home.
- Teenage pregnancy is on the rise, reducing the average age of mothers. One in five births is to an adolescent (15-19 years of age). In some communities pregnancy occurs between the ages of 13 and 15. These factors lead to higher obstetrical risk, resulting in babies with low birth weight, malnutrition and delayed physical and cognitive development.
- In the Plurinational State of Bolivia, 7 out of 10 girls do not go to school and lack real development opportunities; more than two million rural children are living in extreme poverty and only 3 in 10 of them are able to finish primary school.
- In Chuquisaca there has been a 100 per cent increase in HIV/AIDS cases. The persons affected are now younger, and among those under 15, women are the most vulnerable population. Worst hit are rural communities; is estimated that for every case identified, 10 positive cases go undetected.
- The rate of crime with extreme cruelty committed by adolescent men and women has led to some discussion of reducing the age of accountability from 16 to 14. In the Plurinational State of Bolivia there are only four halfway houses for adolescent offenders involved in a restorative justice process.

A multisectoral response would have the protection system jointly run by the municipal ombudsmen for children and adolescents, the courts for children and adolescents, the prosecutor's office for children and adolescents, the national police,

the governorates' departmental social services and some non-governmental organizations. However, effective coordination, communication and referral between these bodies remains problematic, one of the factors being the constant staff turnover. In the municipalities, the system is much more fragile, because strong multisectoral efforts are less effective the more remote the municipality is.

Strategies that promote primary prevention should involve women and girls in the community, who are in a strategic sense a vital part of the solution (prevention, reporting and enforcement) to all types of violence against women. To date, the rules, plans and programmes have viewed girls and adolescent women as "minors", lacking skills and requiring protection. However, they must also be involved in their own defence and must grow in capacity, self-esteem and social responsibility. Given a cycle of violence, it is necessary to forge a cycle of self-esteem and self-determination.

Men are also key in this context. From boyhood on they must be made to understand that a woman of integrity, fulfilled, healthy and purposeful, is vital to the formation of successful families with a good quality of life, which are very positive for the community.

The schools are the place where they must learn respect and coexistence, recognizing the individual worth of men and women, gaining sound knowledge and values, and knowing right from wrong. The decisions they make there will last a lifetime, as they will know their goals and recognize their opportunities.

Finally, the new battleground for prevention is new technologies, for example computerized communication resources, including social networks, which must be used in a positive way to prevent violence.

Girls are our present and the guardians of our future; we must take greater care of them.
