



## Economic and Social Council

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### **Commission on the Status of Women**

#### **Fifty-seventh session**

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**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and 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 World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts, 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 World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts believes that the elimination of violence against women and girls is of crucial importance in ensuring equality and empowerment for girls and women and that the girl child must be at the centre of efforts to implement the Beijing Platform for Action.

Violence against girls and women has been described as one of the most heinous, systematic and prevalent human rights abuses in the world by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. Such abuse is wrong and must stop. The global epidemic of violence, which is a reality for girls and women every day and everywhere, has consequences for their lives, their families, their communities and their countries.

Despite the extent of the violence and its extreme consequences, there are too few conversations, there is too little action, data is too poor and there is limited investment to stop violence against girls and women. There is a very real danger that girls and women will continue to see their rights denied. Over the past decade the rights of girls and young women have been rolled back and there is a reluctance to empower girls and young women. Eliminating all forms of violence against girls and women is an essential prerequisite to achieving the Millennium Development Goals and to successfully implementing the Beijing Platform for Action. Progress, however, in eliminating violence has been slow at best, and absent, at worst.

## **Agreements and commitments already made**

The importance of eliminating violence and discrimination against girls and women is well documented in numerous United Nations and other reports. The Beijing Platform for Action highlights the need by:

- Asserting that discrimination against women begins at the earliest stages of life and must therefore be addressed from then onwards (para. 38)
- Asserting that violence against women presents an obstacle in achieving equality, development and peace, and that violence against women prevents them from enjoying their fundamental human rights (para. 112)
- Recognizing that violence against women brings high costs to society in the areas of society, health and economy (para. 117)
- Recognizing that the girl child is often discriminated against and as a result of this discrimination fewer girls survive into adulthood than boys (para. 259)
- Asserting that girls should be protected from all forms of violence and recognizing that girls require age appropriate programmes and support services to deal with violence (para. 283)

The Secretary-General also made violence against women and girls a priority area in his UNiTE to End Violence against Women campaign, and the formation of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women demonstrates that there is international commitment to end the cycle of discrimination that girls are faced with from birth. However, progress in eliminating violence has been incredibly slow.

### **Violence against girls**

Girls and young women are particularly vulnerable to violence as they face the double discrimination of both their gender and age. Girls and young women are at risk of all forms of violence, including physical, sexual and psychological. Violence is not limited to any particular race, ethnicity or nationality. It causes physical, emotional, financial and social harm in all cultures and countries across the globe. Girls and young women are at risk of violence throughout their lives: from prenatal violence and female infanticide, to child abuse in the home and sexual bullying in schools, to adolescent dating violence, harmful practices and sexual exploitation. Girls and young women are also particularly vulnerable to emerging and escalating trends of violence, including urban gang violence and virtual violence.

The World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts believes that violence against girls must be eliminated. By addressing the root causes of violence, girls will be able to live lives free from violence and the fear of violence. As such, more work needs to be done to challenge gender inequality and discrimination. Gender inequality creates gender roles, norms and expectations that reflect the risk of girls and young women to the experience of violence. Gender roles in many communities create unequal power relationships, with men exerting control over women, resulting in women and girls being given lower positions in their relationships, communities and societies and making them vulnerable to violence and less enabled to access the support they need.

Unequal gender roles that are ingrained in societies impact the ways girls and young women understand violence. Often, violence is so normalized that girls and young women accept it and even condone it. Gender discrimination has also resulted in attitudes that place blame on the victims of violence, such as when victims of rape are blamed for the clothes they wear.

Violence against girls has serious physical, emotional, financial and social effects at all levels, including on the individual and the family and at the community and country levels. As well as being a shameful human rights abuse, violence against girls costs countries billions in health and legal services and lowers their economic output and productivity. Violence against girls results in injuries, disabilities and death. Girls that experience violence can suffer from problems of anxiety, low self-esteem, social isolation and other mental health disorders. Girls are also more at risk of unintended pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections and diseases, including HIV and AIDS.

Despite the fact that the elimination of violence against women and girls is recognized as essential in the Beijing Platform for Action, violence continues to affect millions of girls across the world every day. Up to 70 per cent of women and girls globally will suffer from violence in their lifetimes. This violence epidemic needs to end.

### **Girls as agents of change**

Girls have the right to grow up in an environment that is free from violence and the fear of violence. They have the right to be safe from violence at home, at school and in their communities. Girls should be equipped with the knowledge, skills and opportunities to understand their rights and claim these rights for

themselves and others. If their safety is threatened or compromised girls should have easy access to services that can help them.

Investment in the lives of girls results in benefits for wider communities and for future generations. Despite knowing that investment in girls is the most powerful response to many of the dilemmas facing humankind, international progress in implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and eliminating violence against women is slow, and when directly concerning the girl child often even slower. Less than half a cent of every United States dollar spent on international assistance programmes is invested directly in girls.

The World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts recognizes that girls are the solution to ending the violence. By investing in, training, educating and empowering girls and young women on their rights and violence, they can become powerful drivers of change. Girls are one of the world's greatest untapped resources. They are not just victims, they are the instigators of their own futures and the leaders of change within their communities and globally. By supporting and educating girls on their rights and empowering them to make their own choices, girls can transform and break the chain of violence.

### **Empowerment through non-formal education**

The World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts recognizes that non-formal education needs to play a significant role in the way girls and young women are educated and able to claim their rights. Non-formal education makes an important contribution to the full personal and social development of an individual.

The definition of education of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization shows three distinct types: formal education, informal education and non-formal education, where non-formal education is understood as educational activity that is organized outside the established formal system and is intended to serve an identifiable learning clientele with identifiable learning objectives.

Education is critical in ending violence. Non-formal education can be a powerful tool in ending violence since it empowers girls and young women to understand and assert their rights and can challenge the root causes of violence, such as gender stereotypes and inequality. Childhood and adolescence is a critical stage of personal and collective development, during which times values, understandings and attitudes around gender equality, norms and roles are instilled, thereby making work with children and adolescents of strategic importance to achieving faster and sustained progress in promoting gender equality and preventing and eradicating violence against girls and young women. Non-formal education provides a unique space for children and young people to discuss such topics in a forum that is rarely provided in the formal education system.

Through its mission to enable girls and young women to discover their fullest potential as responsible citizens of the world, the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts is already placing the girl child at the centre of the solution. Through an approach on non-formal education, community action and advocacy, we are empowering the rights and changing the understandings and attitudes of 10 million girls and young women and their communities in 145 countries. As part of the Stop the Violence: Speak Out for Girls' Rights campaign, the World Association

of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts is demonstrating the effectiveness of non-formal education in empowering girls and ending the violence.

### **Call to action**

The World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts calls upon the international community, national Governments and civil society to ensure that girls and young women can grow to fulfil their fullest potential and live lives free from violence and the fear of violence. The Association highlights the need to do more in eliminating violence and discrimination against the girl child. We urge the international community, national Governments and civil society to:

(a) Protect and support all by ensuring that there are specialist services, support agencies and safe spaces where all girls and young women, regardless of background and status, can access support and collect information on violence. The services should be particularly made available for girls and young women who have experienced violence, are vulnerable to violence and who are speaking out against violence;

(b) Work together to establish and resource partnerships across relevant international, national and local organizations that address all forms of violence against girls and young women. Implement holistic and integrated working approaches across all sectors;

(c) Commit to long-term funding at the international, national and local levels for programmes to stop violence against girls and young women;

(d) Create institutional action plans to tackle violence, by implementing an integrated and strategic approach to working on violence against girls and young women, with clear international and national action plans. Invest and implement programmes that address the root causes of violence, such as gender inequality and discrimination, as well as the causes of situational violence such as in the context of conflict, disasters and poverty. Strategies need to take a life cycle approach, include age-appropriate programmes and take into consideration the needs of high-risk groups of girls and young women;

(e) Deliver gender equality education, formal and non-formal, to all girls and young women, boys and young men. Build the understanding and skills of young people to recognize violence against girls and young women, negotiate gender stereotypes and create respectful relationships. Educate girls and young women on their human rights and empower them to claim their rights;

(f) Ensure respectful representation of girls and young women and regulate advertising and marketing to restrict sexist and violent imagery and end objectification;

(g) Recognize how all forms of culture and tradition can create stereotypes, customs and norms that limit and restrict the human rights of girls and young women. Culture, tradition and religion should never be used as an excuse to justify inactivity on tackling violence against girls and young women;

(h) Ensure that girls can access justice, protect the rights of girls and young women through national laws that criminalize all acts of violence against them and increase access to legal justice for girls and young women who are survivors of violence or at risk of violence. Prosecute offenders of violence against girls and

young women, including States that justify the use of violence against girls and young women;

(i) Record and monitor the experiences of violence of girls and young women and establish international standards and common indicators for recording data. Develop robust monitoring and evaluation frameworks to capture evidence of the impact of preventative programmes to stop violence against girls.

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