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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 Advocates for Youth, 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

Advocates for Youth welcomes the theme of “Elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls” for the fifty-seventh session of the Commission on the Status of Women. The organization works globally and within the United States of America to promote programmes and policies to improve the sexual and reproductive health and rights of young people. It supports a global network of 1,000 young leaders and adult allies from more than 60 countries, as well as 65,000 youth leaders within the United States.

The Commission’s emphasis on violence against women and girls is of particular interest to Advocates for Youth, given that violence and discrimination against young women and girls violates their human rights and jeopardizes their lives, bodies, psychological integrity, freedom and sexual and reproductive health.

Advocates for Youth is committed to advancing the rights of young women and girls within a human rights framework and supports the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979), the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (1994), the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) and the Millennium Development Goals (2000).

There is much work that must be done to begin to address violence against women and girls and underlying gender inequality, as illustrated by the examples of violence against women and girls around the world given below:

- Physical and sexual abuse of young women and girls is a reality worldwide. For example, in Nigeria, a treatment centre reported that 15 per cent of female patients requiring treatment for sexually transmitted infections were under the age of 5, while an additional 6 per cent were aged between 6 and 15. According to a survey on reproductive health carried out in Jamaica, approximately 20.3 per cent of young women aged between 15 and 19 reported having been forced to have sexual intercourse at some point during their lives. A report released by the Office of the Procurator-General of Colombia in 2009 showed that at least 27,000 women and girls experienced intimate partner violence in Colombia in 2007, with 74 per cent of those being underage girls. In the United States, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, some 20 per cent of young women experience intimate partner violence.
- Dowry deaths are responsible for the murders of thousands of women every year, especially in South Asia. The United Nations Population Fund estimates that 5,000 women worldwide are burned to death in murders disguised as kitchen accidents each year because their dowry was considered insufficient.
- Honour killings continue to take place in too many countries. Honour killings occur when women are put to death for an act that is perceived as bringing shame to their families, which can mean killing as punishment for adultery or even for being the victim of rape. In Pakistan, nearly 500 women per year are the victims of honour killings.
- In some countries, femicide (the murder of women and girls) persists. In Guatemala, for example, more than 1,000 women were killed between 2001 and 2007, while in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, the high murder and disappearance rate of young women has received international attention.

- Female genital cutting/mutilation causes serious injury to millions of young women every year. It is most prevalent in parts of West, East and North-East Africa, although also practised in Asia and the Middle East and by immigrant populations in North America and Europe. Between 100 million and 140 million women and girls have undergone female genital mutilation worldwide, with 3 million girls at risk of the procedure each year in Africa.
- Child marriage continues to put young girls at great risk of too-early pregnancy and other sexual and reproductive health issues. In sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, more than 30 per cent of young women between 15 and 19 years of age are married, while in Nepal, 40 per cent of girls are married by the age of 15. Early pregnancy and childbirth have severe consequences for adolescent mothers, including complications at birth, obstetric fistula and death, often linked to unsafe abortions.
- Systematic rape and forced impregnation of young women and girls are often used as weapons of war. In addition, women and girls are also subject to forced prostitution and trafficking during times of war, sometimes with the complicity of Governments and military authorities.

As indicated by the examples above, young women and girls around the world face sexual and gender-based violence that puts their lives at risk and violates their fundamental human rights. They are subject to physical, psychological and sexual violence, including harmful traditional practices, leaving them at risk of death, maternal mortality and morbidity, unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV. Young women and girls have a right to be healthy and live free from violence and coercion. We demand immediate action on the recommendations below.

Involve young women and girls

Ensure that young women and girls, in and out of school, married, unmarried, disabled, rural, marginalized, displaced and of all sexual orientations and gender identities, are actively and meaningfully involved at every decision-making level, including in the planning, implementation and evaluation of programmes and policies that affect their human rights. To be meaningfully engaged, Governments must promote and provide capacity-building opportunities, including financial and technical support, to enable young women and girls to inform programmes and policies to prevent sexual and gender-based violence.

Provide comprehensive sexuality education

Provide age-appropriate, medically accurate, evidence-based and rights-based comprehensive sexuality education, which is lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning inclusive, for all in and out of school, disabled and displaced adolescents and youth. It must include information about sexuality; sexual and reproductive health; abstinence; condoms and contraception; healthy relationships; the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence, stigma and discrimination; gender equity; and human rights. In addition, young women and girls who experience violence should be provided with effective referrals to confidential youth-friendly sexual and reproductive health services and support services.

Provide youth-friendly services

Ensure that young women and men and adolescents have access to the full range of youth-friendly sexual and reproductive health services that are confidential, affordable and respectful of young people's rights to privacy and informed consent. Youth-friendly services must include unconditional access to evidence-based and rights-based comprehensive sexuality education and counselling; prevention and treatment of sexually transmitted infections, including HIV; a full range of safe, effective, affordable and acceptable methods of modern contraception and family planning services and commodities, including emergency contraception and male and female condoms; prenatal and postnatal care, including skilled birth attendance and emergency obstetric care; prevention and treatment of sexual and gender-based violence and sexual abuse; and safe and legal abortion services, including post-abortion care.

Furthermore, health professionals working with young people must receive adequate training and support to enable them to provide information and services in a judgement-free environment with full respect for young people's rights to privacy, confidentiality and informed consent. Governments must also ensure that communities, parents and guardians are educated and able to provide effective guidance and support to adolescents and youth who experience, or may be at risk of, violence.

Uphold human rights by removing legal and sociocultural barriers

Ensure that laws, regulations and policies remove obstacles and barriers that infringe on the sexual and reproductive health and rights of young women and girls. This includes rescinding requirements for parental and spousal notification and/or consent, age of consent, mandatory waiting periods and laws and regulations that permit violence and discrimination against young women and girls, married adolescents, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer/questioning young people and other marginalized young people. In addition, Governments should promote policies and programmes that eliminate harmful traditional practices such as early and forced marriage, rape, sexual and gender-based violence, female genital cutting/mutilation and all other forms of violence against young women and girls.

Ensure the systematic collection and application of data on violence against women and girls

Promote and support youth-specific research on gender-based violence with data disaggregated by age and gender, and use such data to inform the development of violence prevention programmes and policies, in partnership with young women and girls.

All young women and girls have a right to live free from violence and coercion, to sexual and reproductive health and to exercise their sexual and reproductive rights. Involving young women and girls in relevant policy dialogue and programming, providing comprehensive sexuality education and youth-friendly sexual and reproductive health services, promoting an enabling legal and sociocultural environment and ensuring systematic collection and use of data in the context of violence prevention and promotion of gender equity are critical to ensuring a world where young women and girls can exercise their rights and live free from violence and coercion.