



## Economic and Social Council

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

#### **Fifty-eighth session**

10-21 March 2014

**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 Defence for Children International, 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

Defence for Children International (*Défense des Enfants International*) wishes to draw attention to the situation of indigenous girls in Colombia, more specifically those living in urban areas, on the basis of information contained in a report by the organization's office in Colombia. The facts cited here relate to conditions in the municipality of Mitú, but they probably reflect day-to-day reality for most indigenous minorities at the present time.

The arrival of outsiders in indigenous territories of Mitú has led to the gradual disregard of the rights of indigenous communities, and in particular those of girls.

Girls suffer a loss of identity, in particular, often accompanied by psychosocial consequences. This feeling of difference is aggravated by the stigmatization they face because of their different culture and language. Yet there is no psychological support offered to help indigenous girls emerge from isolation, and this can lead to alcohol and other substance abuse and even to suicide.

Moreover, indigenous girls endure poor health conditions, which is aggravated by lack of information on diseases, specifically on HIV/AIDS. The number of premature pregnancies is higher among indigenous girls, and is rising steadily, and this reinforces stigmatization, as young pregnant girls are held to be solely responsible for their situation.

Education is another challenge for girls in indigenous territories, reflecting problems of access, lack of infrastructure and economic resources. Moreover, girls who manage to access the education system find themselves discriminated against in school, either by teachers ignorant of their culture or by schoolmates, and boys in particular. This rejection in school undermines conditions for learning and therefore has a negative impact on indigenous girls' studies.

Indigenous girls are also frequent victims of mistreatment and abuse, mainly at the hands of their parents, often involving abuse of alcohol or chicha. They may also suffer sexual violence on the part of their friends. Such acts create a climate of insecurity for these girls, who live in constant fear and dare not express themselves.

**In light of the foregoing, our organization is deeply concerned by the situation of indigenous girls in Colombia, and encourages the Commission on the Status of Women to:**

- Conduct sociocultural studies of indigenous peoples in Colombia living in urban areas in order to establish more accurate statistics, and in this way to derive a better understanding of the realities lived by girls in particular, and to respond more effectively to their needs;
- Lobby local authorities to ensure that respect for indigenous girls' rights figures as a priority issue on the public agenda, with a view to implementing Government programmes to integrate indigenous peoples and prevent discrimination against them.

The situation of indigenous girls in Colombia clearly runs counter to many provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which the State has ratified. It represents a violation in particular of the following articles:

- Article 2: the right to enjoy the specific rights of the child, without discrimination;

- Article 6: the right to sound development;
- Article 19: the right to protection against all forms of violence;
- Article 24: the right to enjoy the best possible state of health;
- Articles 28 and 29: the right to education;
- Article 34: the right to protection against sexual exploitation.

**Consequently, the organization urges the Colombian Government to take the following measures in favour of indigenous girls:**

- Establish a roadmap and implement a system for tracking cases of violence committed against girls, and carry out activities to raise awareness about gender violence;
- Facilitate access to health services and ensure that girls receive appropriate information on the illnesses and risks linked to premature pregnancy;
- Guarantee education and combat discrimination in the schools, through campaigns to raise awareness among pupils and to provide training for teachers to familiarize them with the culture and language of indigenous peoples, thereby leaving more room for these girls' own beliefs and knowledge;
- Consolidate the information system at the local level in order to sensitize the population, in particular to problems flowing from gender and ethnic origin.

In order to achieve a profound change and to find a lasting solution for ending injustice against indigenous girls in Colombia, our organization stresses that the initiatives taken on their behalf must include their free and informed participation, so that projects will truly respond to their expectations and needs.

The organization congratulates the Commission on the Status of Women for its efforts to promote the rights of women, and it would be proud of the chance to cooperate with the Commission in improving living conditions of indigenous girls.

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