



# Economic and Social Council

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## Commission on the Status of Women

Sixty-second session

12–23 March 2018

**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”**

### **Statement submitted by Equality Now, 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.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

Equality Now, an international human rights organization, calls on all member states at the 62nd session of the Commission on Status of Women to continue in their efforts to prevent all forms of violence against women and girls, rural and urban, to repeal or amend all sex discriminatory laws, and to enact laws against “practices” that are harmful to girls, such as child marriage, female genital mutilation and sex trafficking and sexual exploitation.

The High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, in its 2017 HLPF Thematic Review of SDG 5: Achieve Gender Equality and Empower All Women and Girls, has recognized that ending all forms of violence against women and girls is central to the overall achievement of gender equality, as well as the “eradication of poverty and the achievement of sustainable development, peace and security, and human rights”. Although there has been progress around the world, too many laws still remain which are insufficient, inconsistent, not systematically enforced, and sometimes, even promote violence against women and girls. Equality Now’s report, *The World’s Shame: The Global Rape Epidemic — How Laws Around the World are Failing to Protect Women and Girls from Sexual Violence*, highlights the gaps in laws, such as laws that allow the perpetrator to walk free on reaching some sort of settlement, including marriage, with the victim. Additionally, access to justice is often an issue in sexual violence cases, especially for rural women and girls, if, for example, the nearest criminal court is not easily accessible or if the laws impose burdensome evidence requirements, such as the use of a specific doctor in a specific location. Preventing sexual violence can also have an impact on protecting women and girls from sex trafficking, since studies have shown that sexual abuse, especially child sexual abuse, makes women and girls more vulnerable to commercial sexual exploitation.

Discriminatory and stereotyped portrayal of women in the media, especially related to reporting on violence against women, can cause further harm to women and girls, promote rape culture, victim-blaming myths and create an environment for sexual exploitation. As recognized by Equality Now in its’ joint report titled *Just the Women*, published in 2012 in collaboration with Eaves, End Violence against Women coalition, and OBJECT, press regulation and enforcement of media ethics and standards is essential to ensure that media reporting does not cause further harm to women and girls.

Sex discrimination in the law and in practice can take many forms and have far-reaching consequences. For example, a ban on pregnant girls, including those who are impregnated as a result of rape, from attending school, affects the ability of girls to complete their education, particularly in rural areas. Similarly, female genital mutilation and child marriage are not only inter-connected, but also have far-reaching impacts on other aspects of the lives of women and girls subjected to them — including access to education, equal opportunities for employment, and health (including through forced/early pregnancies) — which directly hinders equality and the empowerment of all women and girls, especially those living in rural areas.

Amending or repealing laws which discriminate on the basis of sex, or which do not provide sufficient protection from sexual violence, is an essential pre-condition towards meeting Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls in the agreed upon sustainable development goals in *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (“Agenda 2030”), as well as targets 10.3 (eliminate discriminatory laws, policies and practices) and 16.3 (ensure equal access to justice for all).

We call upon member states to re-energize their efforts and uphold their commitments to the elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls, including by accelerating efforts to repeal or amend all sex discriminatory laws as soon as possible and to ensure that laws and policies give women and girls true protection from sexual violence and access to justice if gender-based violence, including harmful “practices”, is perpetrated.

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