



## Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General  
16 December 2009

Original: English

---

### Commission on the Status of Women

#### Fifty-fourth session

1-12 March 2010

Item 3 (a) of the provisional agenda\*

**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”: implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session and its contribution to shaping a gender perspective in the realization of the Millennium Development Goals**

### **Statement by Plan 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.

---

\* E/CN.6/2010/1.



## Statement

### Protecting girls and boys from harmful traditional practices

1. Any form of violence against children, whether physical, psychological or emotional, is a violation of their right to protection from “all forms of physical or mental violence” under article 19 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Furthermore, it is a fundamental breach of their dignity and integrity; affects the achievement of their full potential; hinders their progress in becoming responsible adults and citizens; and hampers their long-term development. No violence against children is justifiable; all forms of violence against children are preventable.

2. Plan International is an international human rights-based, child-centred development organization working in over 66 countries. It works closely and on a long-term basis with communities, families and children. Among its main focus areas is the prevention and protection of children from violence in various settings, including in the family, schools and the community.

3. Plan International acknowledges the important steps taken since the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in raising international awareness and defining concrete actions for improving the situation of girls and women. We welcome the fact that in 1998 and in 2007, the Commission on the Status of Women focused on adolescent girls and on discrimination and violence against the girl child, respectively. We also recognize that the Millennium Development Goals and international and regional human rights standards promoting gender equality are genuine efforts to combat inequalities on a global scale.

4. We are concerned that, in spite of the great advances in the political and legal frameworks protecting the girl child as a young woman and as a child, girls throughout the world are still subjected to discrimination and violence. In particular, the current global economic crisis threatens to slow down many of the recent gains in protecting the well-being of children, especially that of girls and young women. Plan International’s *Because I am a Girl* report of 2009 documents the following immediate effects of the economic crisis on girls and young women: (a) lending for microfinance and other projects is being restricted; (b) more girls and boys are getting involved in child labour; (c) girls are increasingly being pulled out of education and forced into domestic and other work; (d) infant deaths are increasing — and the majority of these deaths are of girls; (e) more girls and women are forced into the sex trade; (f) young women, employed in the informal and export-related sectors, are the first to lose their jobs; and (g) remittances are reduced and migration decreases.

5. Girls and women suffer gender-based discrimination stemming from socially constructed gender roles and from adverse social and cultural norms. In particular, harmful traditional practices, which are also called social and cultural practices, have a significant impact on the well-being of girls and young women. These practices violate children’s dignity and rights, including their right to life; their survival and development; their rights to health, equal treatment and protection from all forms of physical and psychological violence or abuse; and their participation in the decision-making processes that affect their life. The United Nations study on violence against children highlights the negative effects and the significant impact

of harmful traditional practices on girls' economic empowerment and self-esteem and on the overall development of societies and countries.

6. Furthermore, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child clearly states that customs, traditions, and cultural and religious practices may not be used as excuses for violating the rights of children. In addition, article 5 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women urges State parties to take measures to eliminate "prejudices and customary and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women", acknowledging the role of customs and traditions in perpetuating violence against girls. The Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa more explicitly obliges State parties to prohibit and condemn all forms of harmful practices that have a negative effect on women's human rights.

7. While some practices, like female genital mutilation/cutting, early marriage and so-called honour killings, have been researched and debated, others are still quite unknown. These include, for example, ritual beatings, rape, female foeticide, the obligation to provide sexual services, inhuman treatment of women accused of witchcraft and forcing women to dance in front of community members while baring their bodies.

8. Plan International emphasizes that it is very important to uphold positive aspects of tradition and culture, while at the same time addressing those aspects that are detrimental to the survival, participation, protection and development of girls. We recognize that there are cultural and traditional practices which promote and support human rights values and there are those which contradict them.

9. Plan International therefore urges States to take the following action:

- To review and withdraw all reservations to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and its Optional Protocol.
- To adopt rigorous laws to outlaw harmful traditional practices, amend all discriminatory laws and ensure effective enforcement of laws and policies.
- To educate and sensitize the public on the legislation and harms of the prohibited practices and create child- and gender-friendly structures and mechanisms for children's protection at different levels.
- To ensure that perpetrators of violence against children, including those responsible for harmful traditional practices, are held to account for their actions, as laws will only have effect if they are enforced.
- To develop systematic data collection on different types of gender-based violence, including harmful traditional practices, disaggregated by sex, age, origin and socio-economic status.
- To act against the prevailing negative sociocultural attitudes and gender stereotypes justified by customs, traditions and religious considerations and address violations of the rights of girls caused by harmful practices through the education and public sensitization of girls, boys, women and men, including public officials and persons working with and for children, on the long-term harmful effects that these practices have on girls' development and well-being, as well as on the legal consequences of such acts.

- To promote and encourage research that provides analytical information on all the different types of harmful traditional practices, especially those that are less known, to better target interventions.
- To strengthen or build partnerships and networks to effectively tackle harmful traditional practices at the country level and to guarantee efficient programmes to protect the girls.
- To recognize that girls and young women are agents of change and therefore support their active participation in decision-making regarding all issues affecting their life; in order to eliminate harmful traditional practices it is necessary to challenge power and control structures and question the status quo.
- To ensure that at birth every child is registered and that free registration is available for older children who were not registered at birth to protect them from harmful traditional practices like early marriage and to ensure their access to school, health and financial services.

10. Plan International also urges the Commission on the Status of Women and the United Nations programmes and procedures dealing with gender equality to strengthen or build partnerships with regional human rights mechanisms and mandates to effectively tackle harmful traditional practices at the country level.

---