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Statement submitted by Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes, Inc., Feminist Majority Foundation, Girls Learn International, Inc (GLI), The Grail, Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary-Loreto Generalate, International Council of Jewish Women, International Federation of Business and Professional Women, International Federation of Women Lawyers, International Federation of Women in Legal Careers, International Presentation Association, International Union for Health Education, Passionists International, Perhaps ... Kids Meeting Kids Can Make a Difference, Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary, School Sisters of Notre Dame, The Salvation Army, The Tandem Project, Unchained At Last Inc, and Women’s Federation for World Peace International, non-governmental organizations 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.

*The present statement is issued without formal editing.

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Statement

This joint statement has been prepared by organizations accredited with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). We promote girls' agency and the ongoing inclusion of girls' voices, their needs and rights throughout the UN system, in its international agreements, and at national and local levels. We work in a coalition known as the Working Group on Girls, that was initiated in the lead-up to the Beijing Conference in 1995 and continues today advocating for the full implementation of the human rights of the girl child in all areas and stages of her life.

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action was visionary and comprehensive for its time. It marked the first time that the particular needs of the girl child were recognized, and it established provisions and commitments for upholding her rights and remedying specific discriminations, harmful traditional practices and other obstacles to her full development. Twenty-five years later, we acknowledge and celebrate the many gains for the girl child. However, in the current geo-political situation, with the fracturing of multilateralism, the concentration of neoliberal capitalism that prioritizes profit over people, and the backlash against women and women's rights, we acknowledge the ever-constant threat to achieving full gender equality. We also see how these shifts have negatively impacted girls and girls' rights, which further erode the gains already achieved. Twenty-five years after the introduction of Section L, we must again demand that the rights of all girls in their intersectional identities and locations – across the spectrum of age, gender, sexual identity, race, ethnicity, religious beliefs, class, differing abilities, geographical location, and migratory status – be prioritized in a way that addresses girls' multiple vulnerabilities, and respects their diverse identities.

Due to the “persistence of historical and structural unequal power relations” (sixty third session of the Commission on the Status of Women, agreed conclusions, preambular paragraph), discriminatory inequalities, vulnerabilities, disadvantages, and exclusions associated with girlhood, girls are often predestined to experience discrimination before birth, at birth, and throughout their life cycle. Girls are not women, nor should they be seen as an appendix to women in policy matters. A girl can be a wife, mother, or widow. A girl can be sexually exploited in the family or community, vulnerable to being trafficked into domestic work, prostitution and the commercial sex industry, or subject to rape or sexual assault, especially within conflict situations. A girl can be malnourished, uneducated, trapped within the power dynamics of gender oppression, in poverty, ethnically marginalized, a migrant, refugee, or a victim of climate displacement. All this can be happening while significant processes of physical and psycho-social development occur; indeed, attitudes and practices that undermine girls' equitable status and empowerment, and discount their very personhood continue to persist in communities around the world. When crucial aspects of girls' development – from prenatal development to birth, childhood, and adolescence – are not considered, or when girls are assumed to experience inequalities and violence in the same ways as adult women or male children, we cannot fulfil the promise of girls' fundamental human rights, freedoms and potential in every age and stage of their lives.

For these reasons, it is essential that girls be considered as persons and rights-holders in policy spaces at all levels, and that they be present “at the table” not only in their families, communities, nations, and at the United Nations, but also in helping lead us into Generation Equality. We question why girls are not formally part of Generation Equality, as this is their future. Girls know the specific issues, obstacles and challenges they face now in their everyday lives; they also know what they need to move forward and flourish as human rights holders. They know their own strengths and capabilities, can rightly diagnose the problems and challenges they encounter,

and should be given the opportunity to participate in decision-making spaces, and in creating solutions, which contribute to sustainable, peaceful and gender-equitable societies and nations. Women and other adults are allies in this effort, not spokespersons for girls. Due to the power differential between youth and adults, women and men, girls and boys, girls must be actively supported at all levels to exercise their voice and agency on their own behalf. Indeed, it is girls' voices that can most effectively call adults into accountability and partnership to ensure that the rights of the girl child are guaranteed in all aspects of life. It is her future and also her present. To deny or delay girls' active participation is to prolong the tenuous lack of freedom girls experience on a daily basis throughout the world, and to ensure that the dream of gender equality is never actualized.

Gender equality cannot be achieved without consistent and substantive rights for girls. We have failed in making the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action a reality for girls around the world. We failed to have girls and girls' rights clearly outlined in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Girls' rights were well-enunciated in the nine strategic objectives of the L Platform, with commitments made and actions outlined, and yet 25 years later, they are far from being the reality for every girl everywhere.

We call on the sixty fourth session of the Commission on the Status of Women and Generation Equality to ensure that 'with girls and for girls' means:

- Zero tolerance of discrimination against any girl anywhere;
- The end of harmful cultural attitudes and practices targeting the girl child;
- Respect for the rights and potential of every girl;
- Zero discrimination against girls in education at all levels;
- Zero discrimination against the girl child in health and nutrition;
- Zero economic exploitation of girl child labour;
- Zero violence against the girl child;
- Full participation of every girl child in social, economic and political life; and,
- Valuing of the girl child within the family, community and society.

We call on the sixty fourth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, Generation Equality, and all Member States to act in the interest of the girl child by:

- Allocating sufficient financial resources to ensure the rights of the girl child at home, within her community and country, regionally and globally;
- Compiling disaggregated data in relation to the girl child so as to realistically address her needs and human rights violations, and to accurately monitor legislative changes and the allocation of resources to close the gaps;
- Enacting legislation and fully implementing legislative changes at national and local levels to end all human right violations and discriminatory practices, and to ensure inclusive, equitable, and substantive rights for girls;
- Reconstructing the power differential between girls and boys, girls and youth, girls and women, and girls and men through deconstructing patriarchy, and ensuring gender equality education for all men and boys, with zero tolerance of impunity for perpetrators of any form of gender-based violence;
- Providing quality services – nutrition, health, education, and universal child benefits – in fulfilment of the Sustainable Development Goals – for all girls everywhere so that they can realize their full potential; and,

- Giving girls participatory rights in decision-making spaces in economic, political and social spheres, and providing the support and mentorship necessary for their goals to be realized. This begins with inclusion in the processes of the sixty fourth session of the Commission on the Status of Women and Generation Equality and recognizing girls as rights-holders distinct from women or children.

The Working Group on Girls stands with girls and for girls' rights in every stage of their lives. The sixty fourth session of the Commission on the Status of Women and Generation Equality should do so as well.
