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### Commission on the Status of Women

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**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: the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child**

#### **Statement submitted by the Northern Ireland Women’s European Platform, 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 of 25 July 1996.

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\* E/CN.6/2007/1.



## Statement

The Northern Ireland Women's European Platform (NIWEP) is an umbrella body which seeks to ensure that women in Northern Ireland contribute to debates nationally and internationally. It seeks to increase women's influence and participation in public and political life and contribute to positive social, economic and environmental policies for women. NIWEP works with sister organisations in England, Wales, and Scotland in the United Kingdom Joint Committee on Women, which is the United Kingdom national coordinating body for the European Women's Lobby.

The theme of CSW in 2007 – the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child requires urgent action. The needs of girls and young women and issues relevant to them have received little in-depth consideration. Globally girls and young women continue to experience systematic discrimination, including in education systems, are extremely vulnerable to violence, including sexual violence, and are marginalised from social, political and economic structures.

Girls and young women are particularly vulnerable to gender based violence and sexual exploitation in conflict contexts. They also continue to be subject to violence and danger within the home from child abuse and domestic violence. Despite the fact that the link between domestic violence and child abuse has been established, statutory authorities have not responded appropriately. In many cases children who were ordered by the courts to have contact with a violent parent were further abused as a result of that contact (Radford and Sayer, 1999). The RIGHT of the child to refuse contact with an abusive father is often ignored. These rights should be paramount.

NIWEP is concerned about the trafficking of girls and young women and the dearth of information and research about the problem of trafficking. Young women have fewer opportunities for legal migration and are more vulnerable to violence and exploitation. There is a relationship between trafficking, conflict, poverty and lack of educational and economic opportunities. Measures to address the problem of trafficking need to include responses to improve the rights and opportunities of young women in their country of origin. The UN must put pressure on world governments to ensure that legislation and policy is introduced which ensures that trafficked women and girls are given the full protection of international human rights law and appropriate safe sanctuary and support services in the countries to which they are trafficked.

UN Resolution 1325 does explicitly refer to women and girls but inadequate attention has been paid to the particular needs of girls and young women in conflict and post conflict societies. Many young women are carers of adults disabled by conflict. They themselves experience long term physical and psychological effects of conflict. Furthermore there has been little focus on how they can be more effectively involved in peace building processes. Young women are crucial stakeholders in post conflict reconstruction yet in many countries there has been little or no attempt to engage girls in constructing future peaceful societies, and in doing so to tackle the domination of political arenas by men.

Many girls are marginalised by lack of access to basic services such as education and health services. Often particularly affected are young Roma women and young women from the travelling community in the United Kingdom and Ireland. Often these young women do not complete basic education up to age 14, frequently because they are kept away from school to carry out domestic tasks. Yet education

is vital to enhance women's ability to be economically independent and to participate in decision-making.

Many young women are denied their reproductive rights. They do not have access to sex or to reproductive health services, including abortion. The impacts of this are wide ranging. Young women need access to information and services which allow them to control their own fertility. As stated in the Platform for Action agreed at the Fourth World Conference on Women "the neglect of women's reproductive rights severely limits their opportunities in public and private life, including opportunities for education and economic and political empowerment" (PFA, 1995, para. 97)

- Young women should not perceive domestic abuse as inevitable. Much more needs to be done in relation to preventative educational work. NIWEP call on the UN to ensure that education in relation to domestic violence is a mandatory part of school curricula. We also ask the UN to require statutory authorities and bodies to focus on the RIGHTS of the child in decisions regarding access and contact where domestic violence has occurred.
- NIWEP calls on the UN to ensure that world governments take strong action to prevent trafficking and to provide comprehensive services and support, including protection in law, for women who are victims of trafficking.
- NIWEP calls for the UN to ensure that UN Resolution 1325 is fully implemented in post-conflict societies and specifically for governments to take positive action to address the gender imbalance in the numbers of elected politicians worldwide.
- NIWEP urges the UN to ensure that governments construct an enabling environment to facilitate the greater participation of girls and young women. They need to be prepared for effective participation and measures should include programmes to mentor young women in the process of leadership.
- The UN should act to ensure that every girl and young women benefits from education services and are not discriminated against because of structures or attitudes.
- The UN should act to ensure that governments develop, review and revise reproductive health policy and services to address shortcomings in current approaches and ensure the highest health standards in this regard. This includes necessary budgetary action to facilitate access to high quality, affordable reproductive services.