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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 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 International Volunteerism Organization for Women, Education and Development and Istituto Internazionale Maria Ausiliatrice delle Salesiane di Don Bosco, 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.



## **Statement**

Education is the basic need of every person. In spite of the Millennium Development Goals and the Beijing Platform for Action, the educational level and the educational opportunities for girls and young women are still under question all over the world.

### **Improving child health**

The record is less impressive, unfortunately, in early childhood care and education. A large number of children are entering school with bodies and minds damaged by hunger and diseases. Maternal health has the potential to act as a powerful catalyst for progress in child health and nutrition. Children born to educated mothers are more likely to survive and less likely to experience malnutrition. A recent estimate suggests that improvements in women's education explain half of the reduction in child deaths between 1999 and 2009.

### **Primary education**

The Millennium Development Goals ensured that by 2015 all children would have access to complete free and compulsory education. However, the pace of advancement has been uneven and is slowing. If current trends continue, 72 million children will be out of school by 2015, an increase over the current level. This requires a concentrated effort to increase enrolment and prevent subsequent dropouts. Girl children in rural areas are much affected by household poverty, inequalities and rural/urban differences, along with the poor quality of education in schools, where the classrooms are crowded, books are scarce and teachers are less motivated.

### **Youth and their learning needs**

Secondary schools are more costly and further away. Girls from poorer households are likely to be pulled into labour markets, early marriage and teenage pregnancy, which are the reasons for girls not entering or discontinuing secondary education. The numbers of girls who are married are difficult to estimate because so many marriages are not registered. According to the *Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2011*, the number of adolescents out of the formal educational system was nearly 74 million in 2008. In an increasingly skill-based economy, higher education plays a vital role in professional skills development. Entry into the labour market with a low level of skills results in a lifetime of insecure employment and low wages. In this case, secondary education and skill training become a basic necessity for rural girls living in poverty, as stated in the *Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2012*.

### **Improving levels of adult literacy**

Progress towards adult literacy rates by 2015 has been disappointing. In 2008 there were just under 796 million illiterates, most of them women. The challenge is to reach the marginalized social group. Large numbers of adults have lived in illiteracy because they were denied educational opportunities as children. Meanwhile, a new generation of youth is entering adulthood without basic literacy and numeracy because they dropped out of school or are poor.

**Recommendations**

- Compulsory primary education should not stop with increasing the enrolment of girl children in schools. It should assure quality education with a healthy, adequate infrastructure and a sufficient number of well-motivated teachers in the isolated areas of every State. Education policies should also be in place to monitor the attendance of children and teachers in school.
  - The nutrition and health of children in primary schools require proper attention. Uneducated mothers are often influenced by the tradition of preference for sons and overlook the health of their girl children. Education for young mothers about gender equity, nutrition and child health care is critical. This can be done through media and non-formal education in the secluded areas.
  - Secondary education should be made easily available for all girls in every rural and distant village by decreasing fees, making books and midday meals free for the really poor and, above all, appointing female teachers in secondary education in order to prevent the frequent abuse and violence by male teachers. The State should also take serious measures to prevent teenage pregnancies and early marriages by drafting legislation and implementing rigorous legal instruments in order to penalize perpetrators.
  - Secondary education should also integrate professional skill training that could help girls and young women, especially indigenous, migrant, displaced and marginalized women, who live on the outskirts of society to exercise their entrepreneurial talents. The State needs to take serious measures to prevent dropouts at the secondary level.
  - Care should be taken to reduce illiteracy rates among adults in order to strengthen future families. Apart from school education, adults need to be supported with human rights education, legal education and skill training so as to enhance the achievement of their potential.
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