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Statement submitted by Girls Learn 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.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

The Working Group on Girls is a coalition of over 75 national and international non-governmental organizations with representation at the United Nations dedicated to promoting the human rights of girls in all areas and stages of life, advancing their status and inclusion, and recognizing and developing their full potential and capabilities as partners in action.

At this, the sixtieth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, we welcome the priority theme “Women’s empowerment and its link to sustainable development”, and the review theme “The elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls”. We nevertheless also note the importance of including girls in the priority theme, as girls experience empowerment differently from women. Similarly, the realization of sustainable development impacts girls in unique ways. “Women’s empowerment” is not inclusive of girl children and we note our disappointment about their absence in the priority theme.

It is widely acknowledged that the perpetuation of violence against girls hinders the achievement of gender equality and sustainable development. The outcome document of the fifty-seventh session of the Commission on the Status of Women noted that violence is a cross-cutting issue addressed in different international instruments. The Working Group on Girls agrees with paragraph 10 of the Agreed Conclusions “The elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls” which states that violence against girls is rooted in historical and structural inequalities in power relations that subject girls to pervasive violations of the enjoyment of their human rights. Violence against girls is a form of discrimination that seriously violates and impairs or nullifies the enjoyment by girls of all human rights and fundamental freedoms. This abuse of power extends to public and private spheres, and is tied to cultural and traditional practices. These abuses are intrinsically linked to gender stereotypes that underlie and perpetuate such violence. States must take all necessary measures to prevent violence against girls, not only passing laws but also enforcing them and ensuring that girls have access to restorative justice and other necessary services.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recognizes this reality and seeks to address girls’ issues in Goal 5, and through mainstreaming gender equality throughout the Agenda. In its totality, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development strongly supports the human rights of girls. The various goals take up and address issues that continually plague girls’ development and infringes upon their human rights -poverty, poor nutrition, lack of access to education, health, water and sanitation facilities, discrimination, violence and environmental degradation.

Goal 16 on Promoting Peaceful and Inclusive Societies for Sustainable Development, aspires to create a healthy environment for girls to live and thrive. Every girl has the right to have a legal identity, including birth registration (Target 16.9). She has the right to live without fear of violence, trafficking or exploitation (Targets 16.1 & 16.2). Girls suffer gender-based violence, including female infanticide, honour killings, female genital mutilation, breast ironing, rape, incest, abduction, femicide and child, early and forced marriage. Risk factors associated with age, being female, belonging to an ethnic minority, living in rural areas, lacking education, having a disability, inadequate family protection, living in

extreme poverty and having migrated all contribute to the vulnerability of girls to violence and sexual exploitation, including commercial sexual exploitation and trafficking. Girls in armed and post-conflict situations and indigenous girls are also particularly vulnerable to violence and exploitation. Girls have the right to benefit from the rule of law and to enjoy equal access to justice (Target 16.3). States must seek to prevent and redress violations against girls, and promote meaningful access to justice. Individuals and systems that perpetuate violence against girls must be held accountable, for otherwise we cannot achieve nor create healthy environments for girls to live and thrive.

Girls must be empowered to voice their needs, and be allowed the opportunity to participate fully via inclusive decision-making (Target 16.7). Girls have demonstrated their unique ability and capacity to present, address and understand the issues of the girl child at the annual Girls Speak Out at the United Nations for the International Day of the Girl and during the Girls Tribunal on Violence, Girls Panel on the Millennium Development Goals, and Girls' Advocacy Roundtable, among others during the Commission on the Status of Women. Adequate political will is required to provide a seat at the table for girls so that they can meaningfully engage with all issues that pertain to their lives. To empower girls, prevent violence against girls, and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, girls need to be at the table to shape and inform the very policies and agendas that directly impact their lives.

Communication technology and social media can contribute to the health and education of girls, and be a positive resource for their empowerment, including promoting access to information on how to prevent and respond to violence. Criminal misuse of communication technology for sexual harassment, sexual exploitation, child pornography, trafficking, cyberstalking and cyberbullying threatens girls' safety, health, education, development and well-being. We must also recognize opportunities for building robust virtual communications platforms that advance girls' human rights and enhance access to information that is vital to their empowerment.

The heavy reliance of the 2030 Agenda on a "business as usual" model of economic development is exploitative of girls. The commodification and instrumentalization of girls is unacceptable, as are the unfair burdens placed on girls in terms of the provision of energy and water and unpaid care work. As we begin to implement the 2030 Agenda, we must recognize the persistence of these obstacles and address discriminatory attitudes and violence against girls in a holistic manner.

Recommendations:

- Actively include girls at United Nations and international sessions or discussions as well as national and local meetings that directly impact their lives and rights
- Accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, including targets related to gender equality and the empowerment of girls through comprehensive, coordinated, consistent, sustained, transparent and adequately monitored and evaluated efforts
- Ensure adequate collection of data, disaggregated by age and gender
- Conduct analysis and research relating to the girl child and her specific rights

- Increase and sufficiently allocate financing and human resources for girls programmes
 - Provide adequate access and support for girls seeking redress within local, national, and international rules of law
 - Implement national floors of social protection according to International Labour Organization Recommendation 202
 - Include girls in the implementation and evaluation process of the 2030 Agenda
 - Build engaging virtual platforms that allow girls around the world to learn about their human rights, bring grievances to the international community, and showcase their unique ability to realize human rights in their everyday lives
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