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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

Statement submitted by Plan Sweden, 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.6/2011/1.

Statement

This year's priority theme for the Commission on the Status of Women is "Access and participation of women and girls to education, training, science and technology, including for the promotion of women's equal access to full employment and decent work". In keeping with this theme Plan International in its 4th annual report from the series *Because I am a Girl – the State of the World's Girls* focuses on "Digital and urban frontiers: girls in a changing landscape". Plan looks at new technologies — as one of the fastest growing arenas — from an adolescent girl's point of view.

Information and communication technology offer new opportunities

1. Information and communications technology (ICT) in today's rapidly changing world offer both tremendous opportunities and unique threats to girls, especially during their adolescence. Based on substantive primary and secondary research and Plan's own experience in the field, we understand that access to new ICT and social media can make a huge impact on adolescent girls' lives. For example technology can help girls to: (a) keep in touch with each other, reducing isolation in countries where this is an issue; (b) further their education and acquire new skills necessary for future employment; (c) find work and take an active part in their communities; (d) build specific skills and knowledge on subjects otherwise off limits to girls, such as HIV and AIDS; and (e) keep safe and build self-esteem.

2. Nevertheless, ICT are exposing adolescent girls to images of violence, exploitation, and the degradation of women at a time when they are developing sexually. The Internet creates intimacies with total strangers that seem safe, and so adolescent girls have become the prime targets for modern methods of abuse. Adolescent girls are vulnerable to online solicitation or sexualized "grooming". Girls can become victims of cyberbullying or peer-to-peer abuse, as well as abuse via mobile phones.

Recommendations

3. Strategic investments in ICT infrastructure are required in order to increase access and availability of technology to girls, and so that developing economies can leapfrog towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Ensuring the uninhibited and safe use of ICT as a major part of girls' education provides a window to strengthening economic opportunities for adolescent girls, so that they can make a successful transition to remunerative work and secure long-term economic independence.

4. We therefore call on duty bearers at all levels to invest in creating the infrastructure needed to ensure that girls have access to ICT and are given the opportunity to use these technologies to their advantage. We also call on duty bearers at all levels to work together and do more to protect girls online and ensure they have the capacity and knowledge to protect themselves and each other. Adolescent girls must be empowered to use the Internet and other communications technology safely, on their own terms, and in ways that promote their overall development and build their future economic possibilities.

5. Thus, Plan offers the following specific recommendations on adolescent girls and ICT for multiple stakeholders including Governments, multilateral development

agencies, the private sector and civil society. Fulfilment of these aims is not only a major aspect of achieving the MDG targets, but essential to securing gender equality and strengthening economic opportunities for girls.

A call to action: girls and information and communication technology

Increase girls' access and control over IT hardware

6. Governments and civil society should work together to invest in infrastructure. This should not be limited to hardware, but must include large-scale investments in high-speed broadband communication networks. Ensure computer centres are available in schools and ICT-targeted education is mainstreamed into national curricula so girls will be able to access and use new technologies.

Invest in maths science and vocational education for girls

7. Governments and international donors need to increase girls' access to quality primary and secondary education through financial or technical assistance, scholarships, quotas and other incentives — in particular, science and mathematics and vocational training. Girls must be equipped with the necessary skills to prepare them for a full range of roles in information technology as users, creators, programmers, designers, and managers.

Expand and improve online protection mechanisms

8. Governments need to set up mechanisms to ensure that girls' needs and rights are represented in government agencies tasked with developing and implementing ICT programmes and policies. The unique vulnerabilities of girls must be represented in monitoring and reporting mechanisms for ICT programmes and policies.

Stop violence against girls online

9. Governments should pass laws requiring Internet Service Providers to report the discovery of child sexual abuse images. Government agencies should also establish national tip-line websites for reporting the online sexual exploitation of children and ensure appropriate follow-up.

Implement international legislation

10. Legislation must address the fact that girls are more exposed to the risk of sexual exploitation, violence and abuse through the channels of new technology than boys. Legal instruments need to be enacted, strengthened and implemented to protect adolescent girls from online abuse.

Teach girls how to protect themselves

11. Government, business and civil society sectors need to work together to tackle online protection effectively. This includes sex- and age-specific training for girls on how to protect their privacy and keep safe when online, as well as how to report abuse; and building trust between adolescent girls and authorities such as the police and judiciary through joint activities and gender-awareness training. Governments are called upon to ensure accountable and responsive media for promoting the safety

of the girls, by issuing rigorous guidelines on awareness-building among young people, especially girls on the possible opportunities and risks associated with ICT.

12. Plan International is a global human rights-based, child-centred development organization, working in over 70 countries in the world. Plan works closely and on a long-term basis with communities, families and children (www.plan-international.org).

13. Plan's "*Because I am a Girl*" is a global campaign to fight gender inequality and lift millions of girls, their families and communities out of poverty (www.plan-international.org/girls).
