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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 the Transnational Radical Party, 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*

1. Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is one of the most widespread and systematic violations of the universal human right to personal integrity, committed against millions of women and girls worldwide, abusing them physically and psychologically and damaging their lives irreversibly. It is an affront to human dignity, a violation of fundamental human rights, and is increasingly being recognized as such by children, women and men around the world. The development of political will at the highest levels, encouraged by and in turn encouraging action at the grass-roots levels, is one of the most important achievements of the past decade for the fight against FGM. The Transnational Radical Party, together with No Peace Without Justice, the Inter-African Committee on Traditional Practices, the European Network for the Prevention and Eradication of Harmful Traditional Practices and La Palabra have been engaged in an international campaign for a worldwide ban on female genital mutilation by the United Nations. All partners take this opportunity to thank and congratulate Member States and United Nations agencies that have supported this campaign, the leaders in African capitals and around the world that have contributed their commitment and political will, and the thousands of women, men from all walks of life that have supported the campaign.

2. The vision of the Transnational Radical Party and our partners in Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, the Middle East, South-East Asia and other places still afflicted by this harmful practice is a world where FGM lives on only in the history books.

3. This is why a United Nations General Assembly resolution is so important: it recognizes once and for all that FGM is a human rights violation; acknowledges its gravity and effect on the lives of millions of people; and demonstrates clear commitment and political will at the highest levels to ban it. It reinforces the importance of previous United Nations declarations protecting the rights of women and children and mirrors important steps already taken at the regional level. The African Union, for example, has voiced its commitment to the elimination of FGM in the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, which requires member States to adopt all political and legislative measures necessary to eliminate FGM completely. Furthermore, it encourages the speedy ratification and implementation of international and regional conventions, such as the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (the Maputo Protocol), that recognize FGM as a violation of fundamental human rights.

4. Action by the United Nations General Assembly steps up and signals the international community's universal condemnation of this blatant human rights violation, with important implications worldwide. Critically, it contributes significantly to a global change in the perception of FGM as a clear human rights violation against millions of women around the world, instead of masking it merely as a cultural, religious or public health issue. All of these characterizations, which were effectively euphemisms that had shielded decision makers from the need to take action, were common parlance in the past. A United Nations General Assembly resolution helps strengthen the development of a political and social environment that challenges attitudes and behaviours on FGM and facilitates its elimination. It does so by recognizing FGM for what it is, a form of sexual violence against

* Issued without formal editing.

children and women, and helping to shift the discourse, and the required response, accordingly.

5. A United Nations General Assembly resolution also helps strengthen the development of a legal environment that can support and lead political and social commitment to ending FGM by stating clearly that No FGM means No FGM, with the backup of the full force of the law. By providing indications and recommendations on elements for effective national legislation, a resolution can help the adoption of national legislation to ban FGM that includes sanctions for those continuing the practice, as a clear, unequivocal and tangible sign of the State's commitment to eliminate it. A United Nations General Assembly resolution serves to strengthen laws that currently ban FGM by reinforcing their legitimacy and provides new impetus for those countries that currently do not have such laws on the books. It helps to ease the path towards the most effective legislation in countries where FGM is committed, by providing standards and recommendations, including the facilitation of exchanges of information on how best to eliminate FGM. It encourages the allocation of sufficient resources for the effective implementation of legislation and action plans aimed at eliminating FGM, which is important, both as a political statement of the importance of the issue and as a practical means of accomplishing its elimination. It also provides an impetus for donors, be they State or private, to include and prioritize the elimination of FGM in their programming, allowing them to provide vital support for those who have been working towards ending FGM, often at financial loss.

6. Most importantly, a United Nations General Assembly ban on FGM reinforces the efforts of the thousands of activists working at the national, regional and international levels to see FGM consigned to the history books. It celebrates those who were brave enough to speak out against FGM when it was a taboo to do so and heartens those who still work in such environments, often at great personal risk. It both encourages and provides legitimacy for those working for the enactment of and compliance with legislation prohibiting the practice. By recognizing and celebrating laws that already exist, a United Nations General Assembly resolution helps bestow legitimacy on those people who are campaigning for legislation in those States that do not yet have a law, aiding their struggle by showing that the international community is firmly on their side. It acknowledges the courage of the women and girls who have said no to FGM and helps give confidence to those who want to say no but have lacked the support to do so.

7. This, in the end, is the crux of the matter: the impact of a United Nations General Assembly resolution lies not in the halls of buildings in New York or Geneva, but in the lives of ordinary people, many of whom will never visit those buildings but who look to the United Nations, its Member States and agencies to help make their world a better place. The urgent need to help to raise awareness, to support victims and to protect women and girls who are at risk, by involving all sectors and level of the society, are given a boost when the international community speaks as a whole and takes an unequivocal and joint stance.