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## Human Rights Council

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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,  
political, economic, social and cultural rights,  
including the right to development**

### **Written statement\* submitted by Beijing Changier Education Foundation, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[11 August 2022]

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\* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



## **Addressing Menstrual Hygiene Management as a Basic Right to Development and Enabling Progress across Menstrual Hygiene Management -Related SDGs Within the Context of Human Rights**

Menstruation is a natural part of a girl's life. Nonetheless, the first menstrual cycle often signals the start of a reduction in their fundamental human rights for many girls worldwide. However, menstruation shouldn't be a barrier to realizing women's and girls' human rights. Menstrual hygiene rights are human rights. The preamble of the universal declaration of human rights states that all human beings should be recognized for their inherent dignity.

Affecting a minimum of 500 million people every month, period poverty is the combination of inadequate access to safe menstrual products and the lack of clean water and sanitation. Period poverty has always been a huge problem, but the pandemic has worsened the situation for many girls and women, particularly for those in low-income communities or marginalized groups. Furthermore, due to human rights shaping the development framework of UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), achieving menstrual health is fundamental to achieving human rights for all. Hence, addressing menstrual health is crucial to reaching these goals by 2030.

According to UNESCO, one in ten girls in Sub-Saharan Africa miss school while menstruating. Additionally, the World Bank concludes that girls could miss up to 4 consecutive days of school every month or 10% to 20% of total school time because of their period. Poor access to menstrual hygiene management harms women's and girls' human rights, including the rights to sanitation, health, and education. Realizing the human rights to water and sanitation for women and girls is an essential precondition for enabling good menstrual hygiene management. As highlighted in resolutions on the human rights to water and sanitation by the UN Human Rights Council and General Assembly, women and girls are at a significant disadvantage when sanitation facilities do not allow them to change their sanitary products. This challenge to managing menstrual hygiene safely and with dignity further impacts their access to other human rights: the right to education and health as a lack of such sanitation facilities at school, particularly in rural areas, affects girls' school attendance rates. The final human right affected by poor menstrual hygiene management is girls' right to education. In numerous human rights treaties, states must take measures to reduce girls' school drop-out rates. However, with the inadequate availability of hygiene management tools and sanitary products at schools, girls are forced to miss out on their education, a setback of SDG No. 4.

Effective Menstrual Hygiene Management is essential to achieve a number of the SDGs, including ensuring healthy lives, inclusive and equitable education, gender equality, clean water and sanitation, and inclusive economic growth. The SDGs seek to realize the human rights of all. Thus, period poverty cannot be just a women's issue. It is all of our responsibility to protect the human rights of all. When Period Poverty undermines fundamental human rights, women and girls cannot access safe means of managing their periods and are deprived of their dignity. These challenges posed by poor hygiene management will continue to jeopardize the realization of many SDGs. These SDGs are invariably interlinked by the urgent need for proper menstrual hygiene infrastructure. Thus, to fully achieve the SDGs by 2030, it is necessary to recognize MHH as contributing to a broad set of SDGs.

Over the last decade, significant progress has been made in attention to Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) with the work of NGOs and the United Nations. For example, in 2016, the Special Rapporteur's report on gender equality and the human rights to water and sanitation to the Human Rights Council (A/HRC/33/49) underscored the importance of the water and sanitation needs of women and girls at all times, especially when it comes to human rights, and further outlined recommendations to address women's material needs by improving access to affordable menstrual products. In addition, on July 12th, 2021, the UN Human Rights Council, for the first time ever, adopted a resolution focusing on menstrual health, which noted its concern for the "lack of access to adequate water and sanitation services, especially for menstrual hygiene management, in schools," and "workplaces,"

recognizing girls livelihood to be negatively affected by the lack of means to maintain safe personal hygiene.

Despite such growth, however, much work still needs to be done. For one, there is a lack of data and limited research conducted on period poverty, particularly in rural areas. MHM remains under-acknowledged, often dismissed as an extra rather than a vital consideration for development. Furthermore, as the world moves closer to fulfilling the 2030 Agenda, this is a timely moment to examine the relevance of menstrual hygiene. By identifying linkages between MHM and SDGs to show how MHM is connected to other globally recognized priorities, consistent efforts to assess change and progress in MHM over time are crucial to facilitating the development and integration of indicators and measures.

Therefore, we urge the United Nations Human Rights Council to promote more research and engagement on menstrual hygiene management at schools, especially in developing countries. Integrating menstrual hygiene management such as sanitation programs into relevant national policies is needed to promote access to adequate menstrual hygiene management. To meaningfully address the current gap, key stakeholders, including government agencies, decision-makers, and civil society, need to invest in this issue. Our vision is by 2030; we will build a society where no woman or girl is held back because she menstruates. We will build a society where this person is empowered to manage her menstruation safely and hygienically with dignity but without shame.

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