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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 Plan 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](#).



Statement

Challenges and achievements in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls

This year's priority theme for the Commission on the Status of Women is "Challenges and achievements in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls". Plan International has substantial knowledge about the needs of women and girls and substantial programmatic experience about how best to address these needs, based on its work over the last 75 years. This programmatic experience, supported by the findings from seven annual reports has shown that girls in the poorest regions of the world are among the most disadvantaged people on the planet. They are more likely to live in poverty, more likely to be denied access to education and medical care and more likely to be malnourished, simply because they are girls.

The present statement focuses on the specific achievements and challenges in relation to the implementation of Millennium Development Goals 2 and 3. Specifically, it considers the gains made in relation to the implementation of targets and indicators relating to education and makes recommendations on how the post-2015 development framework could make a comprehensive contribution towards the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

In 2000, the Millennium Development Goals attached quantitative targets and indicators to the effort to systematically address gender inequality. Millennium Development Goal 3, aimed at promoting gender equality and empowering women by eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary education, increased global recognition of the importance of gender equality by donors and Governments and reflected the growing recognition of gender equality as an important development goal. The Millennium Development Goals also contributed to substantial progress in access to education. From 2000 to 2011, the enrolment rate in primary education grew from 83 per cent to 90 per cent, and the number of out-of-school children dropped by almost half, from 102 million in 2000 to 57 million in 2011. Plan International further acknowledges that there has also been progress made on gender parity, with the number of countries with severe gender disparities at primary education level nearly halved, from 33 to 17 between 1999 and 2010.

Despite the achievements made under the Millennium Development Goals, girls from the poorest households continue to face the greatest barriers to education. While the Millennium Development Goals have contributed to greater access to primary education, global statistics mask uneven progress between and within regions and countries, with national-level reporting hiding persistent and sometimes growing inequalities. Of the 138 countries with available data, girls remained disadvantaged in 60 of the 138 countries. The most recent global data also shows that, in 2011, there were 65 million girls of primary and lower-secondary school age who were not in school, compared with 61.7 million boys. Girls from the poorest households face the biggest barriers to education.

Plan International believes girls face specific social, domestic and economic barriers that inhibit their attendance at school. The focus of Millennium Development Goal 3 on gender parity in primary schooling fails to address the

specific barriers that girls face in accessing and completing education. Girls are likely to be negatively affected by low quality schooling, discriminatory attitudes, gender stereotypes and harmful gender norms, and curricula and methods of learning and assessment that disadvantage them and negatively impact their learning.

The Millennium Development Goals framework also failed to recognize and target violence against women and girls, including in and around schools. Such violence, including gender-based violence, is often a barrier to girls' school attendance and prevents girls from realising their right to education in a safe and supportive environment. It also failed to address issues such as child, early and forced marriage, early pregnancy and forms of harmful practices, which often have devastating effects on girls' right to health, education and protection and continue to undermine efforts to address poverty, social inequality and gender discrimination.

The evidence is clear: girls who benefit from a quality secondary education will be better equipped to make informed choices about their lives, which directly benefit the development of their communities and countries. They will be more likely to marry later, they will have fewer, healthier children and they are more likely to remain healthy themselves. The barriers to education for girls therefore also inhibit the development of communities and countries.

It is also important to note that, in the context of implementation challenges, the rapid expansion in access to primary education since 2000 has also led to capacity constraints. A significant increase in enrolment rates has not been matched by better and more strategic investments in the quality of education, giving rise to a "learning crisis" where at least 250 million children are unable to read or count, even after spending four years in school.

Getting the post-2015 development agenda right for women and girls

Plan International believes we will not be able to end poverty without tackling the root causes of gender inequality and protecting, promoting and fulfilling the rights of all women and girls. Despite some gains towards gender equality since the Millennium Development Goals were adopted, girls and women continue to be disproportionately affected by poverty, injustice, violence and discrimination. This is in part because the current Millennium Development Goals framework has largely failed to address the underlying and structural drivers of gender inequality, and to recognize the ways in which persistent gender inequality and discrimination hinder progress across all goals and targets.

The post-2015 development agenda should be grounded in existing international instruments relating to advancing the human rights of women and girls, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. In addition to existing international human rights instruments, the commitments contained in the Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women and the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development should also underpin national and international efforts to realize the rights of women and girls within the post-2015 development agenda.

Recommendations

In order to secure further advances in gender equality after the Millennium Development Goals have concluded, Plan International calls on Member States to include a transformative goal on gender equality in the post-2015 development agenda.

Plan International supports proposals for a stand-alone goal on gender equality and women and girls' empowerment in the post-2015 development agenda. The goal should be comprehensive and systematically address the persistent, underlying and structural causes of gender inequality and also:

- Address violence against women and girls, including harmful practices such as child marriage and female genital mutilation/cutting
- Aim to transform unequal gender power relations, including by tackling the root causes of gender inequality and discrimination against women and girls
- Focus on the most excluded and marginalised women and girls

Such a stand-alone goal should be supported by the inclusion, where relevant, of at least one target on gender equality under each post-2015 development goal. In addition, all goals, targets and indicators should be gender-sensitive.

We also call on Member States to include quality education within the post-2015 development agenda with a focus on equity, equality and participation. Plan International believes it is imperative that the post-2015 development agenda include a stand-alone education goal that promotes universal access to and completion of a quality primary and lower-secondary education for all children at a minimum, with concerted efforts to improve universal access to a quality secondary education. We believe that a quality education must be inclusive and support the development of the full potential of children and young people. Crucially, a quality education should also promote equality and non-discrimination, including gender equality and respect for human rights.

We further call on Member States to include sexual and reproductive health and rights in the post-2015 development agenda. Addressing gender inequality and promoting women and girls' right to health and education also requires measures to ensure sexual and reproductive health and rights. This must include quality, comprehensive, age-appropriate sexual and reproductive health and rights education that enables all boys and girls to make informed decisions about their health and to fully realize their sexual and reproductive health and rights. The post-2015 development agenda should therefore include a target to ensure universal sexual and reproductive health and rights, as recommended by the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda.