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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 World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts, 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

As the leading voluntary movement for girls and young women in the world, the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts believes that girls are key to meeting the promise of the Millennium Development Goals and have to be at the heart of the global development agenda beyond 2015.

Achievements of the Millennium Development Goals in relation to girls and young women

We acknowledge the significant contribution of the Millennium Development Goals to ending global poverty and the impact they have had on the lives of girls and young women across the world. We also acknowledge that inclusion of Millennium Development Goal 3, focusing specifically on gender equality and empowerment, has been particularly essential in recognizing gender equality as a critical aspect of development and in galvanizing donors. However, it is crucial to recognize the important gaps and shortcomings, particularly as we approach 2015.

Broadly, the Millennium Development Goals framework was not efficient in terms of providing a comprehensive platform to address girls' and women's rights in their complexity, and gender equality concerns have not been effectively mainstreamed into the achievement of all the Millennium Development Goals.

With regard to their impact on girls, there are two important shortcomings. Firstly, because of their age and gender girls face unique challenges that have not been reflected in the Millennium Development Goals, but that place significant barriers in the way of progress. While gender equality targets helped to address issues such as gender parity in primary education, they did little to tackle the systematic discrimination girls and young women face on a daily basis. Violence and harmful traditional practices against girls and women remain widespread, with one in three girls in the developing world being a victim of early marriage and almost half of all sexual assaults committed against girls under the age of 16. Pregnancy and childbirth-related complications are the leading cause of death among adolescent girls. The world's most economically vulnerable group is comprised of 600 million adolescent girls, who are significantly more vulnerable economically than adult women or adolescent boys. Underlying these factors are social norms, attitudes and behaviours on the part of families, communities and Governments that must change in order to enable girls and young women to benefit from and contribute meaningfully to development policies and programmes.

Under the themes that have been covered by the Millennium Development Goals, there has been more focus on meeting the targets rather than on the quality of the outcomes. For example, under Millennium Development Goal 2 on education, there has been significant progress with regard to access to education, but no attention to the quality of the educational outcomes or recognition of other forms of education, including the importance of non-formal education and lifelong learning.

Secondly, girls and young women have not been recognized as important agents of change and drivers of development. Eliminating all forms of discrimination against girls and women is not only an important goal in itself, but also has an essential multiplier effect on their families and communities. All available evidence indicates that when girls and young women are empowered to

take action, efforts to implement internationally agreed goals and commitments, including the Millennium Development Goals, are much more likely to succeed.

Agreements and commitments already in place

Reports from the United Nations and other international organizations stress the importance of gender equality and girls' and women's empowerment as a prerequisite for achieving the Millennium Development Goals. It is also broadly recognized that gender inequalities have held back progress on the other Goals. A focus on girls in particular has been consistently cited as key to an effective international development agenda. This has been reflected in many internationally agreed documents.

The recent report of the Secretary-General, "A life of dignity for all: accelerating progress towards the Millennium Development Goals and advancing the United Nations development agenda beyond 2015" (A/68/202 and Corr.1) recognizes women and girls as "major drivers of development".

Among key documents, the agreed conclusions on the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child adopted at the fifty-first session of the Commission on the Status of Women in 2007 (E/2007/27, chap. I, sect. A) highlights:

- The concern that the girl child does not receive sufficiently explicit attention in policy and programme development and resource allocation (para. 10);
- The need to respect and promote the right of girls to express themselves freely and to take the views of girls into account in all matters affecting them, including by taking all necessary actions to empower girls and to facilitate their participation in all sectors, including civil society (para. 14.14 (a));
- The need to involve girls in decision-making processes, as appropriate, and include them as full and active partners in identifying their own needs and in developing, planning, implementing and assessing policies and programmes to meet these needs (para. 14.14 (b)).

Despite this understanding, progress has been incredibly slow and obligations are not being fulfilled.

Girls as central to the post-2015 development agenda: call to action

The World Association calls for recognition of girls and young women as central to the new global development agenda beyond 2015.

The post-2015 development agenda represents a vital opportunity to bring about a transformative change in the lives of girls and young women and their communities. We believe that transformation and sustainable development are only possible with the full and meaningful participation of girls and young women and if they are both beneficiaries of, and equal partners in, the development, implementation and monitoring of the agenda.

We therefore urge Member States to agree to the following:

- (a) That accelerated efforts should be made and renewed commitment demonstrated to ensure that girls in all parts of the world are benefiting equally in the final lap towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals in

2015. This will require addressing the structural drivers of inequalities and recognition of the interdependent nature of all the Millennium Development Goals, as well as adequate levels of investment in the fields of gender equality and girls' and women's rights;

(b) That the new development agenda must leave no one behind, and should acknowledge the centrality of human rights, gender equality and sustainability to any meaningful agenda;

(c) That the new development agenda must address the structural barriers to gender equality by including a stand-alone goal on gender equality and empowerment of girls and women, with specific targets on gender-based violence, economic empowerment and equality in decision-making in both public and private domains;

(d) That gender should be mainstreamed throughout the new framework. Gender mainstreaming ensures the importance of gender concerns and that girls and young women are recognized as being central to the achievement of all development goals;

(e) That data must be disaggregated by both gender and age across all goals, in accordance with the recommendation of the report of the High-level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, which points out that a "data revolution" is needed;

(f) That girls should be recognized as central to the development, delivery and monitoring of the new development agenda. The new agenda must invest in girls' leadership potential and empower them to be the leaders and innovators of the new development framework;

(g) That the new development agenda should address the eight key themes identified by girls and young women as priority areas, namely:

- (i) Attitudes, behaviour change and fair portrayal of girls and young women;
- (ii) Quality education;
- (iii) Creating safe spaces for girls;
- (iv) Eliminating violence, early marriage and harmful practices;
- (v) Girls' and young women's participation and leadership;
- (vi) Comprehensive health care;
- (vii) Decent employment;
- (viii) Environment and climate change.

We believe that failure to recognize girls and young women as central to any sustainable development efforts will lead to exacerbation of existing inequalities and further social polarization. We remain committed to working with the United Nations in building the "world we want for girls", and for all of us.