



## Economic and Social Council

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### **Commission on the Status of Women**

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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 Human Rights Advocates, 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

### **Education as a means to advance gender equality in the post-2015 development framework**

#### **Introduction**

In 2000, States Members of the United Nations adopted Millennium Development Goals comprising eight development goals and objectives to be achieved by 2015. The Goals have been effective in generating global awareness, leveraging resources, streamlining development efforts and increasing accountability among Member States and the international community. However, as 2015 approaches, it is essential that Member States adopt a follow-on framework that maintains momentum and ensures continuity. The post-2015 development agenda presents an opportunity to build on past achievements while addressing dimensions and gaps of the current framework, particularly in the context of gender equality and women's empowerment.

Goal 3, which aims to "promote gender equality and empower women", is the gender-focused goal (goal 5, on maternal health, also relates to gender; however, it is outside the scope of the present statement). The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), in its paper on gender equality and women's rights in the post-2015 agenda, identifies achieving gender equality and women's empowerment as an underlying goal that not only matters in its own right, but is a "prerequisite" for sustainable development. This is because strong, sustainable and balanced economic growth depends on greater equality in all countries. Success in achieving this target, however, has been mixed. Despite advancement in some areas, gender equality and women's empowerment remain "unfinished business" across all countries.

Goal 3 establishes as a specific target to "eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education, no later than 2015". The three indicators for measuring this target are the ratios of girls to boys in primary, secondary, and tertiary education; the share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector; and the proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments.

Education is considered a success story under the original framework, as some of the poorest countries have made some of the greatest strides. According to a paper published by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), entitled "Education for All: beyond 2015: mapping current international actions to define the post-2015 education and development agenda", in sub-Saharan Africa, primary education enrolment rates increased 18 per cent from 1999 to 2009. In Ethiopia, enrolment increased by 3 million between 1997 and 2007, and the number of out-of-school children has fallen from 63 per cent to 16 per cent. However, while considerable progress has been made over time in primary education, gender disparities are more marked and disparate at secondary and tertiary levels, according to *The Millennium Development Goal Report 2013*. The present statement will focus on girls' education and will use examples of school-related gender-based violence to demonstrate the shortcomings of the current development framework in order to better inform a more effective and holistic post-2015 development agenda that incorporates gender equality in all dimensions.

### **Shortcomings to address**

The Global Thematic Consultation on Education in the Post-2015 Development Agenda, convened by UNESCO and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), noted in its report, "Making education a priority in the post-2015 development agenda", that although there have been great strides in education, there are still about 57 million children of primary school age, including 31 million girls, who are not in school owing to financial, social, or physical challenges. The United Nations Girls' Education Initiative identifies the following as impediments that jeopardize the achievement of education and gender goals: poor quality of education; lack of "gender-aware" teachers; extreme poverty; discriminatory gendered norms and practices; structural inequality; and violence against girls. In particular, gender-based violence in schools presents a serious obstacle to gender equality in education, as it adversely impacts girls' participation, attendance and retention in school.

#### **Substantive challenge: school-related gender-based violence**

Violence against girls in schools is a pervasive, yet largely invisible, problem around the world. The organization Plan Canada, in a publication entitled *A Girl's Right to Learn Without Fear: Working to End Gender-Based Violence at School*, defined school-related gender-based violence as "acts of sexual, physical or psychological violence inflicted on children in and around schools because of stereotypes and roles or norms attributed to or expected of them on the basis of their sex or gendered identity". This type of violence is perpetrated by teachers and students, and often manifests itself as sexual violence, bullying, corporal punishment, threats and intimidation. It is estimated that at least 246 million boys and girls suffer from school-related gender-based violence every year. Girls are particularly vulnerable to sexual harassment, rape, coercion, exploitation and discrimination from teachers, staff and peers. This type of violence has detrimental and cyclical effects on the realization of girls' right to education and to learn in a safe school environment, since violence against girls not only poses a barrier to education, but lack of education promotes violence against girls.

Though individual States and the international community have already taken some action to address the problem by making public statements, reiterating their commitments to address such violence and producing manuals and guidelines on safe schools, little work has actually been done to implement, follow-up and evaluate past commitments.

Human Rights Advocates urges States and the international community to develop concrete and adequate monitoring, reporting and enforcement mechanisms to hold States accountable for combating school-related gender-based violence and honouring past commitments regarding such violence.

#### **Lack of gender equality targets and indicators and data disaggregated by sex**

Gender equality targets and indicators and data disaggregated by sex are essential to a holistic and effective post-2015 agenda. As noted at the Global Thematic Consultation on Education, the implementation of each of the eight Millennium Development Goals has often been treated as an individual endeavour, with minimal focus on interaction between the Goals and how efforts to achieve one

of them influence another. Two of the Goals relate specifically to women and girls, namely goal 3 on gender equality and goal 5 on maternal health; two other goals have indicators that are disaggregated by sex, the goal 1 indicators on poverty and the goal 7 indicator on water resources. Although the remaining Goals do not relate directly to gender equality and women's rights, the lack of data disaggregated by sex is particularly problematic as targets and indicators on gender equality are crucial for mobilizing action and resources. When girls and women are visible in data collection and reporting Governments and donors invest more in gender equality. Therefore, ongoing investment in statistical capacity-building and monitoring is necessary to improve the measurement of gender equality indicators in the post-2015 agenda.

### **Inadequate reporting data**

In order to establish a more effective post-2015 agenda, there is a need for better alignment and coordination of national data and international monitoring. The United Nations has acknowledged that not all data produced at the national level reach the international statistical system. For example, although entities at the international, national, and local levels have recognized school-related gender-based violence as a serious and pervasive problem, a concerted, sustainable and systematic approach is needed. Such violence continues to be a barrier to girls' right to education and has lasting effects on all aspects of society. This situation largely stems from the lack of credible data and statistics on instances of violence against girls owing to States' reluctance to investigate violence, as well as victims' fears associated with reporting violence, particularly sexual violence. As a result, violence against girls in schools remains largely unrecognized and invisible.

Inadequate reporting data exist throughout the United Nations. For example, there has been insufficient follow-up to determine whether States have established confidential and accessible reporting mechanisms, implemented anti-violence policies and programmes from a gendered perspective, and improved data collection to compile statistics on violence against children, as recommended by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children. The United Nations should therefore establish an institutional framework at the international level to hold States accountable in furthering their respective commitments to combat and prevent violence against women.

### **Recommendations for action**

Human Rights Advocates:

- Urges Member States and the United Nations to take a two-pronged approach in establishing the post-2015 agenda by adopting a strong, stand-alone goal on gender equality and women's empowerment, as recommended by the High-level Panel on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, and including gender-specific targets and indicators for the other goals, disaggregating data by sex
- Recommends that every goal has clear targets and indicators
- Urges Member States and the United Nations to incorporate recommendations that have been made into the post-2015 agenda while improving on and ensuring continuity with the Millennium Development Goals framework