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Statement submitted by Virginia Gildersleeve International Fund, 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

The Virginia Gildersleeve International Fund, in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, submits this statement for the fifty-eighth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, addressing the priority and the review theme. We are grateful for the opportunity to share our constituents' successes and challenges. Through the grant application process and project directors' feedback, our organization is painfully aware of the absence of basic human rights of women and children throughout the world.

Innumerable studies have shown that advancing the rights of women and girls also advances the family, the community and the country, and that failing to do so seriously affects a country's economic progress. If you are a girl, you are more likely to be a victim of violence and to be denied education, health care or even birth. Starting from birth, women face progressive discrimination that closes doors regarding credit, land rights, widows' rights and employment opportunities. This is why Virginia Gildersleeve International Fund is committed to promoting and advocating for the right to equality, affordable education for girls and women, a decent standard of living, personal dignity, financial independence, autonomy and participation in all forms of civil society.

Over the last 44 years, Virginia Gildersleeve International Fund has addressed the Millennium Development Goals and post-2015 goals by awarding over \$2,320,000 in grants to 486 projects, reaching over 500,000 women and girls. Recent grants have given women opportunities to make a difference in the areas of human rights, violence prevention, craft/business skills training, women's literacy, maternal and reproductive health, health education, science and technology education, sustainable agriculture and women's legal rights. Their projects serve as models for States to follow.

One of the promises made in the United Nations Millennium Declaration pledge was to free all people from the abject and dehumanizing conditions of extreme poverty. Virginia Gildersleeve International Fund urges States to accelerate the Millennium Development Goals, recognize the gaps and frame a new human rights-based agenda with women equally represented in decision-making and leadership positions.

The Millennium Development Goals focus on three major areas: valuing human capital, improving infrastructure and increasing social, economic and political rights. A huge segment of the world experiences serious health and education deprivation accentuated by the inequality of income, gender, ethnicity, disability, age and location. Work must be continued in order to secure the well-being, dignity and rights of women and girls.

Like the Millennium Development Goals, there have been improvements in access and participation of women and girls to education, training, science and technology, but more needs to be done. Virginia Gildersleeve International Fund grantees, such as the Auxilium Girls' School, the first girls-only English language school in Agartala, Tripura, India, are addressing the issue of women in science and technology. The principal of the school, a graduate chemist, realized that girls could not be prepared in science and technology without scientific laboratories. In 2010, a grant from Virginia Gildersleeve International Fund provided science training to girls in primary and secondary school. Since then, Virginia Gildersleeve

International Fund made a commitment to provide three years of funding for biology, chemistry and physics laboratories to enable girls to enter fields formerly monopolized by boys. In Ghana, the Association for Women's Empowerment trained 289 high school girl students with skills in information and communications technology. This training was conducted to help prepare and develop girls' interest in pursuing higher education in science and technology programmes. The skills training helped the girls prepare for their basic education certificate examinations conducted nationwide by the West African Examinations Council. The parent teacher association has been very supportive of the project and activities financed by our organization's grant. Due to the success of the programme, the project coordinator and one beneficiary participated in the national education sector review forum, held in Accra. The forum brought together all stakeholders in education to review policies and to forge a dialogue on challenging issues.

A new post-2015 era demands a new vision and a responsive framework that recognizes inclusive growth, decent employment and social protection. This requires increased allocations of funds for essential services, strengthening political will and improving the international policy environment. Sustainable development enabled by the integration of economic growth, social justice and environmental stewardship must become our global guiding principle and operational standard. This universal and universally beneficial agenda requires profound economic transformations and a new global partnership.

Project directors, who live in States where the majority of women live in poverty and lack access to basic human needs, were recently asked to prioritize the major challenges of the Millennium Development Goals and to rank the goals recommended by the High-level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda. Based on this survey, Virginia Gildersleeve International Fund makes the following recommendations:

- States, businesses and civil society must actively partner in development. A significant number of our grantees surveyed ranked this the most important Millennium Development Goal.
- States must ensure that all development is environmentally sustainable, including energy and natural resources. A significant number of our grantees ranked this as the most important post-2015 recommended goal.
- States must commit to providing affordable reproductive care and programmes to eliminate HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases. A large number of respondents ranked this as important. Grantees in Mali cited this as the most important issue in their communities.
- States must commit to ending all forms of violence against women and girls.
- States must design policies and adequate funding to ensure that girls and women can enjoy full access to education, including science and technology subjects.
- States must commit to the equality of women and girls at all levels of society, including peacemaking.
- States must commit to providing access to water, improved sanitation and food security.

- States must commit to good governance and end corruption. Grantees in several countries cited corruption as the primary reason for a lack of development and women's inequality. One respondent said that, after 34 years of working to provide maternal health, water systems and food, and to prevent child mortality, the greatest issue is corruption and the lack of primary education.
- States must ensure that all post-2015 goals are all inclusive and take into account women and girls of all ages, ethnicities, abilities and sexual orientation.
- States must ensure that any new goals are holistic, encompassing social, economic and sustainable development.

The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) estimated that women represent 70 per cent of those living in poverty, which robs them of most basic human rights. It is time to end the marginalization of women and girls by putting words into action to bring about social justice.
