



## Economic and Social Council

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### Commission on the Status of Women

#### Fifty-ninth session

9-20 March 2015

**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”**

### **Statement submitted by Amnesty 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

### **Make women's and girls' human rights a reality now**

Amnesty International welcomes the opportunity provided by the fifty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women to review the progress made in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. The Platform for Action remains the most comprehensive governmental agreement to date on what needs to be done to achieve women's empowerment, the realization of women's rights and substantive gender equality. It reaffirmed the fundamental principles set forth in earlier human rights instruments that women's rights are an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights.

The twentieth anniversary of the Platform for Action occurs at a historic moment: it coincides with the seventieth anniversary of the United Nations and the fifteenth anniversary of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security. It also takes place when world leaders are negotiating the new development goals beyond 2015. This is happening against the backdrop of a continuing global economic crisis, ongoing discrimination within and between countries, a growing backlash against gender equality, women's empowerment and human rights, and a number of intense armed conflicts in which gender-based violence and other human rights violations are committed against women and girls every day.

At the fifty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, the international community must engage in a comprehensive assessment of progress achieved with regard to the Platform for Action and the commitments made at its first five-year assessment. States must recommit to addressing gaps and challenges in its implementation and redouble their efforts to make gender equality a reality for women and girls worldwide, including through the post-2015 development agenda.

The Platform for Action sets objectives in 12 critical areas of concern where Governments must put forth efforts to effect concrete changes. Adopted by consensus, it is a statement of political commitment by Governments to advance the goals of equality, development and peace for all women everywhere and ensure the full implementation of the human rights of women and girls. However, despite the progress made in some areas, today its agenda of gender equality in all dimensions of life remains unfinished and even challenged in some aspects.

The Platform for Action reaffirms the human rights obligations of States to act with due diligence to prevent and investigate all forms of violence against women and girls perpetrated by State or non-State actors. High rates of gender-based violence globally remain a serious concern, and women and girls face numerous barriers in accessing justice. States must implement effective measures to protect women from violence and ensure that all acts of gender-based violence are investigated and prosecuted in an effective, timely and thorough manner; that reparations and compensation are provided as appropriate; that survivors of gender-based violence are treated fairly and not further traumatized by the justice system; and that they receive appropriate support services.

The Platform for Action recognizes that peace is inextricably linked with equality between women and men and development (see para. 131) and requires Governments to protect the rights of women living in situations of armed and other

conflicts or under foreign occupation, reduce the incidence of human rights abuse in conflict situations, provide protection, assistance and training to refugee women and other displaced women and increase the participation of women in conflict resolution at decision-making levels.

Over the last 20 years, there have been significant achievements, such as the adoption of Security Council resolutions on women and peace and security, the appointment of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict and the establishment of international criminal tribunals and the International Criminal Court, which is required to take action on gender-related crimes.

However, women and girls continue to suffer rape and other crimes of violence in conflict while perpetrators generally enjoy impunity. Women and girls are largely excluded from peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction processes and, as a result, their specific needs are not taken into consideration and they often do not have equal access to reparations.

States must increase efforts to prevent violations and protect women's rights in conflict and post-conflict situations by fully implementing Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) and related resolutions. Women's full and effective participation in peacemaking and peacebuilding processes is crucial in breaking the cycles of violence and discrimination. Women are key in creating peaceful societies and in enabling sustainable development. States must guarantee accountability for crimes of gender-based violence in armed conflict and access to justice, truth and reparation for survivors.

States must accede, without reservations, to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court and other international and regional human rights treaties protecting the rights of women and girls. They must ratify the Arms Trade Treaty and effectively implement its provisions on gender-based violence.

The Platform for Action calls upon States to take action to combat violence against women resulting from harmful traditional or customary practices, cultural prejudices and extremism (see para. 232 (g)). It also calls upon States to refrain from invoking any custom, tradition or religious consideration (see para. 124 (a)) to avoid their obligations to combat violence, and contains numerous provisions on eradicating stereotypes. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women requires States to eliminate cultural practices that are based on stereotyped gender roles. Women and girls continue to suffer gender-based violence and other human rights violations justified by tradition, custom or religion, such as forced, early and child marriage, female genital mutilation and crimes committed in the name of so-called "honour". Women who are, or are perceived to be, lesbian, bisexual or transgender are also targeted for discrimination, harassment and violence. States must increase their efforts to combat these practices. Governments must also resist any attempts to water down language on gender and women's rights under the guise of references to "traditional values", "protection of the family" and "cultural specificities", which threaten to undermine existing commitments in legally binding human rights documents.

The Platform for Action states that the human rights of women include their right to have control over and decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their sexuality, including sexual and reproductive health, free of coercion,

discrimination and violence (see para. 96). However, women and girls continue to be denied their sexual and reproductive rights, and at the United Nations level, some States are attempting to weaken and undermine previously agreed standards on sexual and reproductive health and rights. Governments must uphold the rights of women and girls to make free decisions about their sexuality and reproductive lives, and to enjoy the highest attainable standard of health. States must abolish laws that criminalize the exercise of sexual and reproductive rights and ensure available, accessible, affordable and quality, comprehensive and confidential sexual and reproductive health information, goods and services, and evidence-based sexuality education. States must ensure that women and girls can participate in the formulation of policies affecting their sexuality and reproduction and have access to justice and redress for violations of their sexual and reproductive rights.

The Platform for Action reaffirms international standards that require States to take measures, including positive measures where necessary, to ensure women's equal participation in decision-making in public and political life. In some countries, women as active participants in the political process have taken significant strides towards political and economic equality. However, in others, they face a backlash and attempts to reverse women's gains towards equality. Much remains to be done in all countries before equality in participation is reached, and States must take effective steps to implement their obligations. States must empower and enable women to participate in decision-making and leadership by increasing women's capacity and access to resources and challenging existing power relations and stereotyped gender roles.

Crucial to women's participation in public life is the protection and promotion of women human rights defenders. Women and men who defend the rights of women and girls frequently face violence, harassment and intimidation in violation of their rights, especially when they challenge existing power relations and gender stereotypes.

States have international obligations to ensure protection of human rights defenders and their activities, as articulated in the United Nations declaration on human rights defenders (see General Assembly resolution 53/144, annex) adopted in 1998, and reaffirmed in General Assembly resolution 68/181 focusing on women human rights defenders. States must recognize the key role women human rights defenders play in promoting and defending the rights of women and girls, including those facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination. States must create an environment for defenders conducive to carrying out their important work free from gender-based harassment, intimidation and violence by State and non-State actors.

It is crucial that the fifty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women should conclude with a strong outcome that reaffirms the commitment of Governments to further addressing the challenges to gender equality and women's empowerment and taking concrete action to ensure that these commitments are maintained and strengthened in the post-2015 development agenda, in alignment with States' human rights obligations to protect and promote the human rights of women and girls.