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to the special session of the General Assembly entitled**

**“Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for
the twenty-first century”**

Statement submitted by National Council of Women of the United States and Sociologists for Women in Society, non-governmental organizations 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.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Violence against women and girls remains an enormous barrier to the full enjoyment of female human rights. As the Beijing Platform for Action noted, violence against women is one of the crucial social mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position compared with men. It is a manifestation of the historically unequal power relations between men and women which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men and to the prevention of women's full agency and advancement. Gender-based violence is an egregious and unacceptable human rights violation.

The violent subordination of women begins in childhood. A girl child is denied access to a healthy and meaningful life through such mechanisms as sexual abuse, incest, rape, limited educational opportunities, early entry into the labour market, both paid and unpaid, early marriage, and early pregnancy. Increasing rates of relationship violence and sexual harassment of the girl child impede a healthy relationship with her body and prevent her from making her maximum potential contribution to society. We urge renewed attention to the appeals set out in the Beijing Platform for Action for the elimination of discrimination and violence against girls.

While all women and girls are vulnerable to violence, some are more vulnerable than others. As the Beijing Platform for Action observed, women belonging to minority groups, indigenous women, refugee women, migrant women, women living in rural or remote communities, destitute women, women in institutions or detention, female children, women with disabilities, elderly women, and women in situations of armed conflict are particularly vulnerable to violence. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered individuals are also frequent victims of violence (as reported in [A/HRC/19/41](#) 2011) and often fall outside nation-state protection. We urge Member States to pay special attention to the needs of these vulnerable populations.

To prevent gender and sexuality-based violence and to accelerate progress for women and girls, a multipronged approach is required.

First, Member States must provide for the immediate needs of victims of gender-based violence. We recommend proven practical approaches such as the criminalization of gender-based violence, women's shelters in both urban and rural locations, specialized courts for intimate partner violence, and specialized police units staffed with female police officers. Municipalities should take steps to coordinate services to victims of gender-based violence among police, the courts, prisons, probation officers, social services and health-care providers. Services should include transitional housing and employment after a shelter stay so that women are not vulnerable to recruitment by traffickers. Police and court personnel should receive specialized training to ensure a proper and effective response to women and girls who report violence including violence perpetrated by intimate partners and other family members. Member States should provide generous funding for networks of shelters, counselling centres, and transitional housing for women and girls fleeing from violence and dealing with its physical, emotional, and practical ramifications.

A special concern is violence against women and girls perpetrated by United Nations peacekeepers. We urgently demand that United Nations peacekeeping

missions eliminate sexual violence by United Nations peacekeepers and safeguard women and girls in refugee camps and in areas protected by United Nations peacekeeping missions.

A second critical approach to preventing gender-based violence is to provide women and girls with the education and training needed to have real economic alternatives to a violent relationship. Member States should ensure that all girls complete their primary education and have access to secondary and tertiary levels. School curricula should challenge traditional views of male domination and female subordination, promote equitable gender relationships at all stages of life, and provide science-based reproductive education. Schools should address gender and sexuality-based violence specifically and help both girls and boys to recognize and report violence and to strategize alternatives. Governments should aim to finance education at the primary and secondary levels without school fees that make education prohibitive for poor children and orphans.

Member States should expand literacy programs for adult women, especially in rural areas, to provide them with occupational skills and give them the confidence to organize for women's human rights. Educated women are more able to press for the enforcement of laws protecting women and girls such as those against domestic violence and early marriage.

A third approach to the prevention of gender-based violence is to challenge images of male dominance and female subordination perpetrated by the media and traditional beliefs and practices. Governments should encourage news and entertainment media to avoid reproducing traditional views of male dominance and female subordination. Media sources should model alternative masculinities that honour peaceful displays of gender and solutions to problems. Traditional practices that subordinate women and girls such as early marriage, forced marriage, and female genital mutilation should be proscribed by law and vigorously enforced.

To prevent sexuality-based violence, we urge Member States to fully translate the United Nations resolution on the human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered persons ([A/HRC/17/L.9/Rev.1](#), 2011) into laws and anti-violence and anti-discrimination campaigns.

In pursuing the approaches outlined above, governments should work actively and cooperatively with women's non-governmental organizations focused on the elimination of gender-based violence, gender inequity, and the structural violation of women's and girl's human rights. Member States should engage women's non-governmental organizations as key participants and policy-makers when establishing national strategies on gender-based violence including guidelines, procedures, educational, health, and work programs, and when implementing legislation.

Economic crises often have a detrimental effect on gender relationships and make gender-based violence more likely. We urge Member States to examine the causes of economic crises and take vigorous steps to prevent them. Rising unemployment creates strains in the household that may precipitate increased levels of gender-based violence. Austerity programs in response to economic crises cut back on services for victims of violence such as shelters, health care, and legal and social services. Economic crises affect the poor disproportionately and poor women may feel no alternative but to engage in prostitution to support their children. When

economic crises occur, we urge Member States to keep in mind the gender dimension of economic crises and to protect services for victims of gender-based violence.

To monitor gender-based violence and assess progress towards prevention, Member States should work with the United Nations Statistical Commission to develop gender-disaggregated indicators on the incidence of violence. In accord with guidelines issued by the Statistical Commission, the indicators should measure the prevalence, severity and frequency of physical, sexual, and psychological violence against women and girls by age and relationship of victim to perpetrator, including intimate partner violence, child sexual abuse and spousal homicide. Sociologists for Women in Society recommends as well the measurement of violence on the basis of gender identity, sexual orientation, and disability, the frequency and prevalence of human trafficking, and the disaggregation of all indicators by gender, class, ethnicity, and rural/urban location.

In addition to quantitative measures and where these are precluded due to the sensitive nature of gender-based violence, qualitative measures should be used to provide a full understanding of gender-based violence and efforts to prevent it. When collecting data, governments should work actively and cooperatively with relevant women's non-governmental organizations.

The World Health Organization Multi-country Study on Health and Domestic Violence against Women is a useful model for the development of standardized surveys, including training of interviewers and safety of respondents. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime should develop standardized gender-disaggregated indicators for use by police departments and court systems to assess the effectiveness of Member States in responding to violence against women and girls.
