



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
8 December 2014

Original: English

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 People to People, 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.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Education is one of the most important aspects of development. There is no development without human capital, education, and health. We all know education is the greatest equalizer and it is the antidote of poverty. No country or institution has fully developed without supporting educational opportunities. Particularly, empowering and educating girls play a vital role for a country's economic and social development. These benefits range from political stabilization to breaking the cycle of poverty; from increasing agricultural productivity to reducing horrific human rights violations; and from saving the lives of children to curbing the spread of disease. Women and girls are key actors for development of nations, but women bear a disproportionate burden of the world's poverty (United Nations women, 2011).

Education can change everything in a person's life, especially for girls; it is an engine to make their life better; it empowers girls to make good decisions in regard to their personal life, to protect their health, and to improve her living conditions and the lives of others around her. Education can make girls aware of their rights. If they are aware, they can protect themselves from abusive acts. For example, our personal life attests to the importance of education for girls. Since we are educated, our living condition is very different from that of our sisters and friends who are uneducated. Uneducated women are not empowered to make many important life decisions — not only in regard to resources but also in relation to their own bodies and health. They do not have the right even to use birth control in order to limit the number of their children. Their voices are unheard in many situations and their needs are unmet accordingly. However, educated women have the power to discuss and to influence necessary decisions about issues which matter in their lives.

Many girls in developing countries for example are subjected to early marriage, suffering from sexual abuse, human trafficking, and sex trade. The majority of them experience discrimination even in their families' homes, and are more likely to have limited access even to primary education. However, for those who have a chance to join schools, education is a weapon and a resource that can help free them from such life challenges. Education can lift girls out of poverty by altering the economic conditions of their family and their country at large. Thus, investing in girls' education can make a real difference and has a higher return than many other kinds of investments. It is a means to fight poverty at its core.

Women, particularly in developing countries, have experienced gender inequalities at various levels such as at home, in the community, workplace, and the society at large. In this case, education can provide the necessary preparation for women and girls to protect themselves from abusive and demeaning acts. If women are educated, they can have the confidence to claim and defend their rights accordingly. Our life experience is the best example for this notion. Education has made us strong enough to argue not only for our rights but also for the rights of others, and to devote our career to this goal.

In the developing world, best practices in changing girls' life through education are emerging. People to People, as a responsible non-governmental organization, has established a boarding school for girls in one of the remote areas of Ethiopia. These girls are one of the most vulnerable and neglected groups in the society. They are orphans without access to school and a better life. However, because of what People to People offers, they are now able to attend schools,

including college level science, medical schools and engineering. They are also able to develop their skills in different aspects, and have become good social role models for other girls. They have protected themselves from what most other girls are suffering from: early marriage, early pregnancy, domestic violence and abuse, being raped, living in the streets, illegal migration and so on. These all improve the power of girls' education for the development of one country and for making the world safe and nurturing for each individual including girls.

In relation to this, let us add some comments about the teenage girl Malala Yousafzai, who recently won the 2014 Nobel Peace Prize. Her commitment and dedication exemplifies how girls' education can have ripple effects and inspire others worldwide. Only 17 years old herself, Malala has overcome devastating obstacles and has gone on to dedicate herself to girls' access to education. The courage she has demonstrated serves as an outstanding model and inspiration for girls worldwide.

In conclusion, education is a powerful tool for women and girls in general. It provides avenues toward freeing ourselves from gender inequalities, making our lives better, leading healthy lives, and intervening positively in others' lives.
