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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”**

Statement submitted by World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts, 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

“If women are to be equal partners with men, in every aspect of life and development, now is the time to recognize the human dignity and worth of the girl child and to ensure the full enjoyment of her human rights and fundamental freedoms”. This statement from the Beijing Platform for Action is as valid today as it was in 1995, and sadly, issues identified in the Platform for Action persist today. Too many girls continue to face injustice and violence on a routine basis, too many girls are robbed of their childhood by being forced to marry and in far too many societies, being born a girl remains a major source of discrimination and exclusion.

The World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts believes that, as we review the Beijing Platform for Action and shape the new development agenda, addressing the deeply ingrained structural causes of discrimination and upholding girls’ and women’s rights must remain paramount. This is a moment of opportunity, challenge and, above all, responsibility. By tackling inequality at its heart, we can change the future for 1 billion girls around the world.

Progress so far

“It is the year 2014, and we face the disadvantages that come with being both young and female. We are kept from attending school, we spend time looking after home and family and live with the persistent threat of violence. We are being denied our rights”, shared Pippa, a young member of the Guiding movement, in her open letter to Members of Parliament of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

The year 2015 is a milestone in many respects. Not only does it mark the twentieth anniversary since adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action, but it is the year in which a new global development framework will be adopted to succeed the Millennium Development Goals. Despite some hard-won gains in gender equality over the past 20 years in some areas, the pace of developments, has been incredibly slow and gaps remain stark. Girls remain the group that has received the least attention and experienced the least progress since 1995.

Gender equality and girls’ and women’s empowerment have been fully recognized as prerequisites for achieving the Millennium Development Goals. A focus on girls in particular has been consistently cited as key to an effective international development agenda. We should not forget, however, that gender equality and the empowerment of girls is not only about smart economics, but first and foremost about basic human rights. These rights are upheld by a number of declarations, treaties and other outcomes, negotiated by Governments, that affirm gender equality as a fundamental human right.

Major challenges and way forward

To turn the 20-year review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action into a real opportunity, Member States must be open to acknowledging the gaps and failures, and to addressing those with the utmost urgency.

Mainstreaming gender equality in decision-making

Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action must remain a priority for all countries. The rights, priorities and aspirations of more than 50 per cent of the population can no longer remain on the sidelines. They be included where they belong: in the mainstream of any policy, any strategy and any decision.

Girls at the centre of policy

While the Beijing Platform for Action marked an important milestone for girls' rights, through inclusion of a special section on the girl child (chap. IV, L), girls continue to be discriminated against from the early stages of life, through childhood and into adulthood. The interests of girls as a distinct but diverse social group continue to be underrepresented. Yet some of the 20-year review reports do not even refer to the Platform for Action's section on the girl child. Many of those who have reported on the issue have reported broadly on progress for children, but not specifically for girls. Understanding that the discrimination experienced by girls is different from that experienced by boys, men or women is key.

Social change to achieve gender equality

Structural inequalities that prevent women and girls from exercising their rights and achieving their fullest potential are well documented, even by national review reports issued by Governments. Since, in many countries, gender inequality is deeply rooted in entrenched negative social norms, attitudes and behaviours towards girls and women that confine them to traditional gender roles, political commitment at the highest levels is essential for triggering social change.

From the 20-year review to a post-2015 call to action

The mission statement of the Beijing Platform for Action underlines that its success will require a strong commitment on the part of Governments and international stakeholders. As the leading movement for girls and young women, we are engaged every day in working to achieve our vision of a world in which all girls and young women are valued and take action to change the world. As we identify the gaps in implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, we urge that Member States deliver on their promises with the following actions:

- (a) Renew efforts to achieve the full and effective implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action;
- (b) Translate rhetorical commitment into genuine action, and allocate adequate resources that will help to achieve the strategic objectives of chapter IV, section L, of the Platform for Action, regarding the girl child;
- (c) Support organizations that provide girls with opportunities to thrive;
- (d) Take note of lessons learned from the implementation of the Platform for Action to inform thinking on the post-2015 development agenda.

The fifty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women provides a critical entry point for moving from the 20-year review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action to a new development agenda. Through consultations with girls and young women, the Association has identified the major challenges that

they face, as well as the solutions that they propose for reaching the world in which they want to live beyond 2015.

“The world I want for girls is one of equality. It is one of respect for humans everywhere and one of development. It is a world without suffering, poverty and hardship. It is one where all children are educated and have access to health care. It is one where girls and women are empowered and appreciated”. This call to decision makers was posted by a young woman from the Philippines on the Association’s “World we want for girls” blog.

To deliver transformative change for all girls and young women beyond 2015, we urge Governments to listen to what girls have to say, to be ambitious and to commit to the following regarding the new development agenda:

(a) To leave no one behind, by recognizing the intersecting nature of inequalities that render girls and young women particularly vulnerable to violence, abuse, neglect and deprivation;

(b) To ensure a stand-alone goal for gender equality and empowerment that incorporates a life-cycle approach for empowering girls and women at different stages of their lives. Strong targets that address the underlying structural causes of gender inequality should be included under the goal, including the following:

(i) To eliminate deeply rooted discriminatory social norms, attitudes and behaviours that prevent girls and young women from enjoying the full spectrum of their human rights;

(ii) To eliminate all forms of violence, as well as other harmful practices, against girls;

(iii) To ensure equality in decision-making at all levels, in both the private and public domains;

(iv) To mainstream gender in the new development framework across all goals;

(v) To invest in data collection and reporting systems in which indicators are disaggregated by sex and age across all goals;

(vi) To recognize girls and young women as central to the development, delivery and monitoring of the new development agenda.

The new agenda must acknowledge the leadership potential of girls by investing in their empowerment through education, with particular attention to high-quality education beyond primary school. It must also recognize informal education as critical to the empowerment of girls. Investment in human rights and gender equality education should be prioritized, as this type of education initiates a transformative shift in attitudes towards the role and standing of girls and women in society.

We remain committed to working with the United Nations, Governments, civil society organizations and other stakeholders to help build a world in which all girls can reach their full potential.