



## **Economic and Social Council**

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### **Commission on the Status of Women**

#### **Sixtieth session**

14-24 March 2016

**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and  
to the twenty-third 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 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.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

The theme of the Commission on the Status of Women “Women’s empowerment and its link to sustainable development” provides a timely opportunity for United Nations Member States to reflect on the ongoing and emerging gaps and challenges to women and girls’ empowerment and gender equality, and agree on practical steps for addressing them in Agenda 2030. United Nations Member States must ensure that the Sustainable Development Goals, adopted in September 2015, will be implemented in all countries in such a way as to effectively achieve women and girls’ empowerment and the full realisation of the human rights of all women and girls. The moment to do so is now when Member States are embarking on a process of implementing the goals, targets and indicators in their regional and national contexts by developing national strategies, policies and programmes.

The Sustainable Development Goals reaffirm that gender equality and women and girls’ empowerment are intrinsic to sustainable development — a link that has already been acknowledged in the Convention for Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979), International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action (1994), the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995), and the Millennium Declaration (2000). Furthermore, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action reaffirmed that achieving gender equality and women’s empowerment would be impossible without full realization of women’s rights as an integral and inalienable part of universal human rights. Despite progress and concrete gains in some areas, two decades later the agenda of gender equality in all dimensions of life remains unfinished.

Gender inequality remains the most pervasive form of inequality around the world. Women and girls continue to face harmful gender stereotypes and entrenched discrimination on multiple and intersecting grounds leading to exclusion, consistently lower status in society and violations of their human rights. Certain women and girls are at greater risk of exclusion and human rights violations when gender discrimination is compounded by discrimination on other grounds, such as in the case of young women, adolescents and girls; women and girls of minority or Indigenous status; women and girls who are lesbian, bisexual or transgender; and those living in poverty or belonging to marginalized groups. This is occurring in a current climate of a continuing global economic crisis, growing inequalities within and between countries and increasing backlash against gender equality and human rights, which even further exacerbates gender discrimination and inequality.

Gender discrimination is evident in the persistently high global rates of gender-based violence, perpetrated by both state and non-state actors, and other violations of women and girls’ rights 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 as well as gender non-conforming persons are also targeted for discrimination, harassment and violence. While perpetrators of violence enjoy impunity, survivors continue to struggle with numerous barriers in accessing justice, remedy and support services. As a result, they are often excluded from health, education, employment and other opportunities, which would allow them to develop their full potential.

At present, the world is witnessing an unprecedented number of armed conflicts and violent extremism where gender-based violence and other human rights abuses are being committed against women and girls on a daily basis. United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 adopted fifteen years ago recognized that women's full and effective participation in peace-making and peace-building processes is central to breaking the cycles of violence and discrimination, building peaceful societies and enabling sustainable development. However, women continue to be denied participation and voice at the table for conflict resolution and peace building, which leaves those processes blind to the specific needs of women and girls, and deprive them from equal access to reparations and other important decisions in the post-conflict and reconstruction phase. Women's empowerment and participation is essential at all stages of conflict resolution and reconstruction, including as an essential factor to contribute to the prevention of future violence and conflict.

The Sustainable Development Goals specifically recognise the importance of sexual and reproductive health and rights as an integral part of achieving women's empowerment and gender equality. However, those rights continue to be violated in a number of ways. The right of women and girls "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", as articulated in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (paragraph 96), continues to be challenged. The criminalization and failure on behalf of States to provide access to health care information and services needed only by women and girls, such as safe abortion, is another manifestation of gender discrimination. Unsafe abortion is one of the leading causes behind preventable deaths and injuries of women and girls in pregnancy and childbirth. In many countries, women and girls cannot freely access sexual and reproductive health information, goods and services such as family planning and contraceptives due to the lack of such services, or because of barriers such as the requirement for third party authorization. Young women and girls are not provided with the comprehensive sexuality education necessary to empower them with information and skills to prevent unwanted pregnancies and make responsible decisions regarding their sexual and reproductive lives.

Women and girls' access to safe and quality education and secure employment opportunities as well as women's participation in public and political life are still lagging behind in many countries. In some countries, women as active participants in the political process and public life have taken significant strides towards political and economic equality. However in others, they face backlash and attempts to reverse the gains made towards equality. Much remains to be done in all countries before equality is reached, and states must take effective steps to implement their obligations, including to dismantle gender stereotypes which prescribe a secondary role to women in society, and create an enabling environment for women's leadership and participation. This includes creating an environment conducive for women-led civil society and women human rights defenders, who often challenge the existing gender relations, to carry out their important work free from harassment, intimidation and violence.

It is crucial that the 60th session of the Commission on the Status of Women reaffirms the central role of women and girls' human rights for their empowerment and gender equality. The Commission must urge States to prioritise the promotion, protection and full realization of the human rights of all women and girls in the

implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. We urge Member States to implement the following concrete recommendations:

- Reform discriminatory laws, policies and practices. Develop laws, policies and practices in line with obligations to respect, protect and fulfil women and girls' human rights. Accelerate efforts to implement the commitments in the International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action, Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Women Peace and Security agenda.
- Ensure that the Sustainable Development Goals, targets and indicators at national and regional level are gender-sensitive, rights-based and inclusive. Ensure that national policies and programmes for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals are aligned with States' obligations to respect, protect and fulfil the human rights of all women and girls.
- Ensure that women and girls are able to truly participate in the planning, implementation and monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals policies and programmes, including by guaranteeing that women-led civil society organisations and women human rights defenders have the capacity, resources and mechanisms to meaningfully engage, and that their voices are heard.
- Allocate and acquire appropriate resources to implement the agenda, including through strengthening global partnerships and generating domestic resources. In resorting to increased engagement and involvement of the private sector, Member States must commit to ensure responsible business practices at home and abroad, and hold the private sector to account in line with human rights obligations.
- Ensure accountability at the national, regional and global levels. This accountability framework must be based on a transparent, open and participatory approach which seeks to engage all relevant stakeholders, in particular those who are most marginalized and discriminated against, and who stand to benefit the most from development. The framework must seek to strengthen the existing accountability mechanisms, including human rights reporting mechanisms at global, regional and national level.

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