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gender equality, development and peace for the
twenty-first century”**

Statement submitted by Rutgers, 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

Engaging men and boys: the other side of the coin to addressing root causes of sexual and gender based violence to women and girls

We welcome the long overdue discussion on challenges and opportunities faced by women and girls living in rural areas.

We focus our attention on the global pandemic of violence against women and girls. In every part of society, women and girls are subjected to physical, sexual and psychological abuse that cut across income, class and culture. Statistics show that women and girls living in rural areas are confronted with specific risks because of their isolation, limited access to shelter and absent government services. Violence against women and girls violates women's and girls' human rights and fundamental freedoms. Violence against women and girls is a severe obstacle to the achievement of the objectives of equality, development and peace.

In order to eliminate the violence, there is a critical need to address the roles and responsibilities of men of all ages in preventing and ending gender based violence in rural settings, and examine the root causes of violence against all women and girls, including the socialization of men, power, patriarchy and masculinities. As major perpetrators, the target audience for primary prevention, holders of the social norms and influencers of other men, men need to be engaged to reduce and prevent gender-based violence. There is a much broader spectrum of roles for men and boys to play than perpetrator or potential perpetrator of gender-based violence. These roles include engaging men as agents of change, not only to prevent and reduce violence against women and girls, but also to free them from the limits and harms of patriarchy and dominant masculinities. As the evidence base grows, evaluation data appears, lessons are learned, and best practices are shared, we believe critical work on men and masculinities should complement the pivotal and often ground-breaking work on women's autonomy and empowerment.

Two country examples of rural women and girls in Indonesia and Pakistan give further insight in the realities and root causes of violence against women and girls.

Specific evidence on the position of women and girls living in rural areas and the roles of men and boys can be found in the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES) Pakistan (Pak-IMAGES). Many of the traditions that prevail in communities across Pakistan have implications for power dynamics in gender relations. In general, women are expected to be submissive to the male members in their families — especially fathers, brothers, and husbands — who are considered their protectors and whose use of force as a means of maintaining control is widely accepted. Women's sexuality, in particular, is controlled as a part of the "honour" of their "protectors". These norms manifest in the various traditional forms of discrimination and violence, such as child marriage; exchange marriages (watta satta); compensation marriages (vani); and honour killing (karo-kari), among others. Pak-IMAGES probed respondents' perspectives on such traditional forms of violence for a deeper assessment of their gender attitudes. Respondents were asked whether specific traditional practices constitute violence against women and girls. The majority of both men and women affirmed that compensation marriages, forced marriage, child marriage and exchange marriages, constitute violence against women and girls, demonstrating that harmful gender norms are visible in daily life and widely accepted.

Another example of the challenges faced by rural girls and women can be found in Indonesia. Rural society is entrenched in patriarchal culture. Men still hold power over decision-making in both the household and within the community more broadly.

Additionally, there is a lack of access to standardized support of (reproductive) health services in rural areas. Child marriage in rural areas is 1,5 times higher compared to urban areas and a UNICEF report showed that there is a correlation between poverty and education as contributing factors to this high incidence of child marriage in rural settings. There are many opportunities for women to access economic empowerment activities in rural areas, but within the constructs of a patriarchal society, a husband's permission is needed for wives to get involved in activities outside house. With the rise of conservatism among Muslim communities — more and more couples are committed to practice the concept of good (sakinah) family, placing the husband as the head of household. Therefore, men play a key role in violence prevention programs in rural areas as well as in addressing the root causes of gender inequality.

We encourage Member States to take into consideration the following points:

In order to prevent and respond to violence against all women and girls, its root causes must be tackled. This should include, but not be limited to, working with men and boys, to challenge the underlying attitudes and social norms that lead them to commit violence. Existing frameworks largely fail to recognize the need to specifically address the social norms relating to masculinities that cause violence against women and girls, and the potential of policies and programs that target men and boys in their various roles to challenge these norms and attitudes.

Rigid gender norms and harmful perceptions of what it means to be a man or a woman, encourage men's use of GBV, granting them the power to dictate the terms of sex and control over resources. As a result, women are still too often in a submissive position, lack political and economic power and suffer from violence. The rigid gender norms and harmful practices that determine individuals' behaviour, causing gender based violence and gender injustice, are upheld and reinforced by communities, civil society and institutions alike.

Men's use of violence against women and girls is not random. Clear drivers are witnessing or experiencing violence as a child, norms and attitudes that support violence against women and girls, a lack of accountability and context of impunity, and economic stress. These factors can be exacerbated in certain contexts, such as those with pervasive gender inequalities patriarchal family structures; and areas of (post-) conflict.

The necessary fundamental transformation of harmful social norms to prevent gender based violence and promote gender justice can only be realized if international, regional and national human rights and standards recognize these root causes of violence and addresses the individual/relationship, community, civil society, institutional and governmental levels simultaneously and in a mutually reinforcing manner.

Well-designed gender-transformative programs with men and boys that change underlying destructive gender norms are effective in reducing violence against women and girls. These programs seek to reshape gender relations to be more equitable, and free both women and men from the impact of destructive gender and sexual norms. However, programmes remain mostly NGO-led, small scale, short term and have failed to reach large numbers of men and boys. In order for work with men and boys to have the desired impact, a more concerted effort is needed to take these programs to scale and institutionalize them. This should involve a multi-sectoral approach and committed partnerships between governments and CSOs, the health, education and justice sectors, the media and the private sector.