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

### **Statement submitted by Udisha, 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.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

### **Women empowerment through education and training in India: role of right to education act and government schemes for the girl child**

India, one of the largest democracies in the world, has made substantial progress in equality and human rights since independence. There have been lots of challenges on this path of democracy. Efforts have been made by successive governments to ensure education for all and gender equality. Promoting women's education and ensuring female literacy have been the major factors behind India's success. India is progressing fast as never before towards socio-economic development, as more and more Indian women are becoming part of its economy through education and empowerment.

Indian women's problems are unique. They face deep-rooted prejudices in social relationships. Women do not, generally, have equal status in marriage. The dowry system is still rampant. Clandestine bigamy and child marriages are persisting, with complete impunity, in contravention of the laws. A fairly accurate assessment of Indian women's progress can be made from their active participation in the elections, as voters and candidates; in their awareness, commitment and involvement in national issues; and through their impact in democratic processes. Women are striving for dignified recognition of their individuality and their multi-role contributions. Indian women have been participating in the country's affairs steadily. Their easy adaptation to new ways of life is a story of considerable achievements. Increasingly venturing into new avenues of public and private employment, they fulfil their roles with confidence and a mature sense of responsibility. In the all-India competition and selective examinations, some women have been at the top of the lists. A woman, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, of course, has held the office of prime minister, with distinction and strength for almost 17 years, with a break of around three years. Another woman, Mrs. Pratibha Patil, held the office of the president for a full term of five years. There are women governors, ministers, ambassadors, and women in scientific, administrative, judicial, educational, and professional services. Despite social pressures, there is no field of activity in India in which women are not participating. However, there are many challenges in achieving the desired goals.

In this statement, an attempt has been made to examine the role of the government in eliminating discrimination against girls in education, skills development, and training. This was a critical area of concern in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action of 1995 and is a visionary agenda for the empowerment of women.

Formal education in the modern world is essential to human development and the basis of life with dignity. We need a robust vision of education as a public good to include empowerment, social identities, capabilities, and access to social networks and capital. We must also include considerations of quality, infrastructure, teaching, learning, and accountability. The Indian Government has been making efforts to provide universal and equal access to and completion of primary education and to eliminate the existing gap between girls and boys, as stipulated in Article 28 in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The Right to Education Act, enacted by the Government in 2009 for free and compulsory elementary education, has given a new impetus to the efforts of the Government in this direction. This is a reflection of the Government's commitment to education. In fact, India has already met Goal 3 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in terms of enrolment. The overall enhanced enrolment rate has obviously increased the enrolment rate of girls.

Similarly, efforts have been made to ensure equal access to secondary education and equal access to higher education, including vocational and technical education for all girls and boys, the disadvantaged, and specially abled. Nevertheless, major challenges with the quality of the education persist.

The concerned Ministries – Human Resources Development, Women Child Development Ministry, and Social Justice and Empowerment – have introduced various schemes from time to time, offering financial incentives to girl children and to enable parents to provide proper education, have enough savings for marriage, obtain subsidies and loans, and avail quotas.

Some of the schemes implemented by India's Federal Government are:

1. Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana

Sukanya Samriddhi account is a famous and popular scheme backed by the Government of India. The “Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao” (meaning “Save Girl Child, Educate Girl Child”) campaign started by the Government, is a saving scheme for the benefit of the girl child. It secures the future of girl children by encouraging parents to build a fund to meet the expenditures for the education and marriage of their girl child. The aim is to enable parents to save an adequate amount to secure a bright future for your girl child.

2. Balika Samriddhi Yojana

The Balika Samriddhi Yojana, specifically for the upliftment of girls, is a small saving deposit scheme launched by the Government of India to change the attitude of the community towards female children at birth, retain and enrol girl children in schools, assist girls to take up income-generating activities. The amount of scholarship can be deposited in an interest-bearing account, and the maximum possible rate of interest is ensured and matures when the girl turns 18 years old, helping to promote positivity about the girl child and eliminate discrimination.

Some state governments have launched their own schemes under different names but with more or less the same features. The schemes are framed in such a manner that the parents of a girl can receive financial incentives at the time of her birth, and she can be admitted to school in Grade-I, V and XII, or at different age. The schemes help in spreading positivity about the girl child, enabling them to continue their education without financial constraints and eliminating discrimination. The amount of scholarship can be used for higher education and further training.

These different schemes are some of the steps to ensure parents and families that girls are not to be considered a burden, and are supported. Apart from these, other schemes introduced by the Government through academic institutions benefit the girl child. The Central Board of Secondary Education, the statutory body regulating secondary education, has launched a scholarship for single girl children who pass their Grade X examination from a school affiliated with the board school and who achieved a minimum of 60 per cent marks. This scholarship is designed to supplement the efforts of parents in promoting education among girls and to provide a financial boost to deserving and meritorious students.

Similar initiatives have been taken by the Government for providing incentives to girls pursuing higher technical education. A scheme named “Pragati” (meaning development), for providing opportunity to further girls' education and prepare them for a successful future by “empowering women through technical education”, has been launched. Thousands of scholarships are disbursed to meritorious but under privileged women every year under this scheme.

The Government has also launched a scheme called Kishori Shakti Yojna to empower adolescent girls. Adolescence is a crucial phase in the life of woman. At this

stage, she stands at the threshold of adulthood. This stage is intermediary, between childhood and womanhood, and is the most eventful for mental, emotional, and psychological well-being. If adolescent girls are excluded from the developmental programmes aimed at human resource development, the life-cycle approach for holistic child development will remain unaddressed.

Under the scheme, the adolescent girls are being provided adequate access to vital health and nutrition information and services aimed at improving the nutritional and health status of adolescent girls and at promoting self-development, awareness of health, hygiene, nutrition, family welfare, and management. One significant component of the scheme is arousing awareness about personal hygiene and the provision of free sanitary napkins for all adolescent girls in government schools.

An educated woman is like a magic wand that brings prosperity, health, and pride. We just have to unleash her potential and see the magic happen. We have improved a lot on women education since our independence, but still much remains to be improved. Although successive governments have tried to bring radical changes in education and training systems for women, there are many impediments, such as a lack of will to implement the schemes, a lack of proper supervision, and inadequate checks and balances. The government, non-governmental organizations, other social groups, and society as a whole need to recognize and address these issues. Only then, will we be able to eliminate all kinds of discrimination against the girl child, including in education and training.

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