



# Economic and Social Council

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## Commission on the Status of Women

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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 International Association of Schools of Social Work, International Presentation Association, Maryknoll Sisters of St. Dominic, Inc., and Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary, non-governmental organizations 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

This statement was prepared by the International Presentation Association and joined by other NGOs holding consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council.

Violence against women and girls continues to be one of the most widespread and devastating human rights violations. We affirm that girls are human rights-holders, distinct from women or boys. Increasing women's and girls' participation and decision-making powers in every aspect of society, helps accelerate progress in eliminating violence against them. The empowerment of women and girls enables them to be good leaders, decision makers and participants in public life and politics, as well as in their family and personal relationships.

Women and girls experience violence in a variety of contexts: the family, the community and broader society. There are many different forms of violence against women and girls, including physical, sexual, verbal, psychological, financial, technological and cultural abuse. We emphasize that while gender-based violence can happen to anyone, anywhere, some women and girls are particularly vulnerable – for instance, young girls and older women, women and girls who are migrants and refugees, indigenous, homeless, and those who experience disabilities.

Violence affects women and girls' ability to enjoy their rights and freedoms equally with men and boys. Violence against women and girls, further, has devastating lifelong effects, including their physical and mental health. Beyond its impact on individuals, violence against women and girls has serious and negative consequences upon families, communities, societies and entire countries. We are deeply concerned that the COVID-19 pandemic and the confined living conditions of lockdown, with severe health, economic and social impacts, have amplified existing inequalities and power imbalances and have disproportionately affected women and girls worldwide. According to UN Women Shadow Pandemic (2020), an increase in domestic violence cases has been reported globally.

Gender-based inequality and discrimination, social norms and gender stereotypes, are root causes of violence against women and girls. Addressing its drivers and structural causes is the only way of putting an end to violence against women and girls. We fully believe that women and girls of all ages and backgrounds must not be seen only as victims, but as agents of change and equal partners in eliminating violence. In this sense, we promote women's and girls' participation and leadership in all forms of decision-making in public and personal life. Women's and girls' equal participation in decision-making is a necessary condition for their own interests and perspectives to be taken into account in policy-making and programs which affect them. We further support efforts to engage women and girls survivors of violence at every decision-making position; they know best what they need to recover and how to prevent instances from happening again.

The empowerment of women and girls is further essential in eliminating gender stereotypes and harmful cultural and social practices. We strongly emphasize that education is a powerful tool in dismantling such stereotypes and practices. It further increases women and girls' skills and abilities for participating in decision-making positions. From early childhood, girls need to be educated, encouraged and enabled to participate in activities that build leadership skills. Such preparation provides them with knowledge and expertise to recognize abusive behaviors and then to advocate for the elimination of all forms of violence in their families, schools and wider communities. Observing role models in a girl's childhood enables her to vision and dream and will generate a future empowered woman. Skills training in leadership, public speaking and political campaigning, further enables women to be good leaders

and decision makers in raising awareness and responding to gender-based violence in every context, be it in politics, the workplace, private sector, judiciary, police or military, academic institutions, national, regional and international organizations.

Members of the International Presentation Association - a network of Catholic congregations and friends - are leaders in their missions and professions, working in partnerships with women, children and their communities to educate and empower them with skills in all aspects. In countries of their presence, the Presentation Sisters, along with Presentation People, empower women and girls in indigenous and non-indigenous communities, in rural and urban areas, to take action against their human rights' violations such as human trafficking, domestic and sexual violence, kidnapping and murder, by engaging them in leadership programs, community education, home-based counseling, advocacy and networking initiatives. They also support women and children seeking migrant, refugee and asylum status by building skills that help them to integrate and participate in future roles in host communities. In collaboration with other partners in local contexts, the International Presentation Association further builds capacities to raise awareness about putting an end to forced marriages and about the necessity of establishing emergency and long-term accommodation support to young women and girls who are victims of gender-based violence. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Presentation Sisters and People, actively engage in school programs that launch prevention strategies for minimizing violence against women and children by encouraging families' and children's participation within the community, strengthening relationships, supporting their well-being and mental health, and mitigating lockdown issues that may lead to various forms of violence.

We acknowledge that twenty-five years after the landmark Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action many advances for women and girls have been achieved. However, we are deeply concerned that progress in strengthening women's and girls' rights has not gone far or fast enough. Much more need to be done, worldwide, to address the backlash against women's and girls' rights and meet the promise of gender equality.

We call upon Member States to:

Implement solid legal and policy reforms to ensure women's and girls' equal access to and full participation in decision-making spaces in political, economic, and social life;

Ensure that survivors of gender-based violence are included in decision-making roles at the family, community, local, regional, national and international level;

Promote formal and informal education, including leadership and gender awareness training, for women and girls of all ages; Further, support non-governmental and civil society organizations that provide opportunities for quality lifelong education;

Encourage initiatives that develop women's capacities to lead, including promoting women's participation as candidates and voters in electoral processes and women's representation in governmental bodies, the judiciary, and public administration;

Develop transparent criteria for decision-making positions in public life free from threat of violence and focused on gender-balanced composition;

Work closely with the private sector and women's organizations to support women's leadership in the workplace, building an environment in which women receive equal pay, and are free from sexual harassment and gender-based discrimination;

Collaborate with stakeholders, including civil society organizations, to provide educational programmes for men and boys about gender discrimination and the essential participation of women and girls in decision-making for the elimination of violence;

Put an end to the criminalization of victims of gender-based violence (such as women and girls who are trafficked, who migrate or flee from their homeland, or those encountering forced sexual exploitation and labour), to avert the negative impact upon their social status, which undermines their ability to develop, flourish, and build upon leadership skills;

Allocate additional resources for providing equal access to special support services (health care, shelters, legal aid, psycho-social care) for victims of gender-based violence to assist them with a faster recovery and reintegration into society and in future participatory/leadership roles;

Honour their obligations to end violence against women and girls as outlined in the Convention of the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other human rights treaties and to implement commitments made in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action;

Ratify the International Labour Organization's Convention 190 (2019), concerning the elimination of violence and harassment in the world of work and effectively implement it without delay;

Step up efforts to end the closure or destruction of girls' schools by nonstate actors and to increase protection of schools and of girls who wish to learn but are located in volatile areas.

Endorsed by:

Company of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul

School Sisters of Notre Dame

UNANIMA International

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