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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 Plan International, Inc., 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

Overview: Beijing+25

Although one of the areas of concern outlined in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action is the girl child, each one of the 12 areas of concern is directly relevant for girls. Girls, by virtue of both their gender and age, remain one of the most marginalized and excluded populations in the world. Despite the distinct needs of girls resulting from the intersection of gender and age-related vulnerabilities, their rights are not well mainstreamed within the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Efforts to advance the gender equality agenda for girls tend to be lumped together with efforts geared towards adult women, leaving their experiences out of the discussion altogether.

It is crucial that the sixty-fourth session of the Commission on the Status of Women urges Member States to acknowledge the various challenges faced by girls to the realization of their rights, as well as measures to be taken by States to remove these barriers while reviewing progress on the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, providing policy guidance and ensuring the empowerment of girls in its deliberations and outcome statement. This requires including girls' voices, realities, and participation in this important conversation.

Overarching recommendations

1. Increase investments in key girls' rights agendas, both through integrated strategies within broader policies and programmes to drive forward the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and through targeted interventions that specifically address identified rights violations affecting girls.
2. Implement initiatives to shift discriminatory gender norms by talking to communities and traditional and religious leaders to explore what arguments resonate, and provide incentives to drive behavioural change.
3. Invest in standardized indicators to measure progress on girls' rights, in particular to capture the lived realities of young adolescents aged 10-14, who remain invisible. Routinely collect, analyze, and disseminate data to assess progress.
4. Ensure girls and young women are meaningfully represented and heard in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action review process and the Global Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Forum.

Detailed Recommendations

Across the 12 areas of concern outlined in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, Plan International urges Member States to ensure girls' human rights are upheld by:

1. Poverty
 - Increasing public spending on basic services, explicitly laying out how much they will spend on services that are essential for girls; which sectors and types of services they will prioritize; and which groups they will ensure are reached by those services.
 - Spending biased towards better-off people is especially damaging for the women and girls who depend on these services the most. In the absence of safety nets, catastrophic health expenses and sudden environmental shocks are major causes of poverty and destitution. Investments should be accountable to and planned together with women and girls.

2. Education
 - Ensuring universal access to quality, safe, free and gender-responsive early childhood, primary and secondary education, tertiary education, and technical and vocational skills training including in emergency settings.
 - Ensuring the provision of safe and separate sanitation facilities with adequate menstrual hygiene facilities.
3. Health
 - Adopting and accelerating the implementation of laws, policies, and programmes to respect, protect, and fulfil women's and girls' rights to have control over and decide freely on matters related to sexuality and reproduction, including sexual and reproductive health, free of coercion, discrimination, and violence.
 - Ensuring universal access to comprehensive legal, social, physical, mental, sexual and reproductive health services and information, and comprehensive sexuality education, free from discrimination, coercion, and violence.
4. Violence against women and girls
 - Harmonizing, reforming, passing, enacting, and implementing legislation, policy frameworks, and accountability mechanisms to eliminate all forms of violence against girls and young women, including through training police, the judiciary, and legislators on laws and rights related to gender-based violence, and on age- and gender-sensitive means of documenting and following up on reports of such violence.
 - Providing and maintaining safe and reliable public transport, footpaths, market places and public facilities, to support women's and girls' mobility.
5. Women in armed conflict
 - Promoting and supporting the systematic participation of girls and young women in the context of all peace and security processes, including the design and implementation of humanitarian responses, conflict prevention, peacebuilding, and recovery processes.
 - Preventing and responding to gender-based violence against girls and young women during all phases of a crisis, including by prioritizing the provision of necessary services for girls and young women survivors of violence, including gender-responsive and child-friendly psychosocial and health services, especially sexual and reproductive health services.
6. Women and the economy
 - Legislating against gender discrimination and harassment in the workplace.
 - Directing investments to address entrenched discriminatory policies and practices in order to reduce barriers faced by young women in getting and keeping decent work of their choosing.
 - Supporting and promoting demand-driven skills programmes targeting youth, especially young women and adolescent girls.
 - Undertaking measures to recognize, reduce, and redistribute women's and girls' disproportionate burden of unpaid care and domestic work by encouraging boys and men to share equally in care and domestic work and through access to adequate parental leave, affordable and accessible quality childcare, flexible work hours, and social security mechanisms, without reductions in labour and social protections.

7. Women in power and decision-making
 - Adopting a lifecycle approach to women's and girls' empowerment by creating an enabling environment from early in life. This includes: dedicated efforts to dismantle discriminatory gender norms; 12 years of safe, gender-sensitive, quality education; life-skills and demand-driven skills training; and access to financial services and literacy for girls and young women.
 - Supporting the participation of girls and young women, and youth- and women-led civil society organizations in decision-making bodies and processes at all levels.
8. Institutional mechanisms for women's advancement
 - Ensuring that girls' rights are represented within institutional mechanisms and bodies dedicated to women's advancement, by including a dedicated taskforce that deals specifically with adolescent girls' rights.
9. Women's human rights
 - Signing and ratifying all relevant international and regional human rights treaties, in particular the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Violence Against Women and the Committee on the Rights of the Child, and aligning national legislation with international law.
 - Differentiating girls' human rights from women's or children's rights.
 - Refraining from adopting age- or gender-neutral approaches and adopting policies and legislation targeting girls and their particular marginalization and discrimination.
 - Not politicizing issues relating to the girl child and consistently using the strongest, most progressive (those most favourable to the advancement of girls' rights) agreed language available.
10. Women and the media
 - Promoting and increasing the number of women leaders and the visibility of women's leadership in the media industries, sending the message that women and girls belong in all spaces and places of power.
 - Ending the use of degrading and inferior portrayals of women and girls and increasing women's participation in decision-making spaces within media industries.
 - Funding female filmmakers, programme makers, and content producers. Investing in girls and women as storytellers while addressing harassment and discrimination in the media industry.
11. Women and the environment
 - Ensuring girls can meaningfully participate in climate decisions and actions as powerful agents of change; girls' right to quality education is protected before, during, and after extreme weather events and other humanitarian crises; and girls are equipped to take a leading role in the just transition to a green economy.
 - Ensuring national climate strategies respond to those most vulnerable to climate change, and recognize the social implications of the problem. Girls' rights and gendered approaches must be addressed in adaptation and mitigation of national policy.

- Increasing funding for climate adaptation strategies. Climate finance is inadequately supporting those already feeling the impacts, and must reach the most vulnerable, especially girls and young women.

12. The girl child

- Continuing to advance efforts against the nine objectives outlined in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action to ensure girls' rights are upheld.
 - Integrating efforts to advance girls' rights into the broader Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action to ensure girls' rights are mainstreamed into existing and new efforts to achieve the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and are not secondary objectives across this agenda.
 - Accelerating efforts to advance agendas that specifically affect girls, including: female genital mutilation; child, early, and forced marriage; early pregnancy; discrimination in health and education; and child sexual exploitation and abuse, including online.
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