



# 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 Girl Scouts of the United States of America, 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

This year, the United Nations celebrates the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and recognizes the gains made towards gender equality and the gaps that must be fulfilled. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action was revolutionary on many accounts, but particularly as the first document to fully address the needs, concerns, and unique issues of the girl child in her own right.

Twenty-five years later, though clear progress has been made on behalf of girls, significant work remains to be done. This statement from the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action still rings true: “In many countries, available indicators show that the girl child is discriminated against from the earliest stages of life, through her childhood, and into adulthood.” Today, there are over 1 billion girls in the world, and they remain among the most marginalized and vulnerable members of communities. From infanticide to child marriage to gender-based violence to effects of poverty, climate change, and migration, girls continue to face challenges that keep them at the margins of society.

Yet the achievement of gender equality is impossible without addressing the unique issues of girls in all their intersecting identities. Policies and programs directed toward girls’ unique issues can create systemic change not only for girls but for their communities. Girl Scouts of the United States of America calls on governments and the United Nations to reaffirm, implement, and enforce policies and programs that focus on the full implementation of the rights of the girl child, with particular attention to the following areas:

### Human rights

Girls’ value to their society and the world has been primarily referred to in terms of economic development, without acknowledgement of their inalienable human rights. Programs and policies that support girls, such as those that enable their education, nutrition, access to health and sanitation, and more are often touted for the benefits they provide to the women these girls will become, not the human beings they are today. It is true that if girls are more economically secure, a country triumphs. The economic growth of a nation, however, should not be the only or even the primary reason for respecting and affirming the rights of the girl child. The review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action must consider the needs of the girl child from a human rights perspective and recognize that girls’ rights are human rights.

### Education

Ensuring girls have access to quality education continues to be pivotal in the fight for gender equality. Though significant progress has been made in girls’ enrollment and attendance rates, gender disparities still exist in elementary and secondary enrollment. Schools continue to lack adequate sanitation facilities to meet girls’ health needs, gender-based violence in schools impacts girls’ ability to learn, and gender biases remain prevalent in subjects and class placement, particularly in the areas of science, technology, engineering, and math. The ever-growing digital gender divide must be addressed to ensure that girls have the skills and opportunities to be fit for the economies of the future. In the United States alone, 1 million new science technology, engineering, and math professionals will be required to fill the workforce pipeline in the next decade (President’s Council of Advisors on Science & Technology), and more than 80 per cent of jobs today require digital skills (Buing Glass Technologies). Gender bias, lack of relevant and quality education, unbalanced domestic responsibilities, and lack of access all play a role in expanding the digital

gender divide. Governments must institute policies and programs to support girls in science, technology, engineering, and math fields and training on digital tools and resources so girls can receive education that will empower them today and tomorrow.

Consistent high-quality education provides the opportunity to shift prevalent and underlying cultural norms, biases, and stigmas that impede girls' full realization of their rights. This can range from educating men and boys on gender equality and toxic masculinity to shifting social attitudes about the role of girls and women in society to combating gender biases that result in girls being denied educational opportunities, forced into early marriage, and being overly burdened with unpaid care work. Member States and United Nations agencies must recognize, finance, and support the formal and non-formal education of all members of society to alter the negative attitudes that impede girls' progress and realization of their rights.

### **Enforcement, Protection, and Financing**

Member States around the world have committed to a number of different international declarations and conventions that provide a legal and policy framework to ensure gender equality, in particular: the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Nonetheless, according to the World Economic Forum, it will take 108 years to close the global gender gap. Many of these declarations and conventions do not even address the needs of girls directly, leaving them so far behind that they are not even on the page.

Government and all law enforcement officials must be taught to recognize and enforce laws that protect the rights of girls. This is especially significant given the power differential between law enforcement officials and girls, who face increased marginalization due to their gender and age. This marginalization is further exacerbated when considered with the intersection of religious, ethnic, or racial tensions.

Progress requires more than declarations and statements. Implementation and financing of girl-specific programs are necessary, but they are often absent in the current efforts to achieve gender equality.

### **Girls' leadership and participation**

Girls have often been the most "left behind" when it comes to participation and inclusion in decision-making, even on issues that impact their own lives. Girls are the best experts about their own needs and experiences and about the challenges they face in their lives today. Every effort must be made to encourage their participation and meaningful inclusion in decision-making spaces – from the local town council to the General Assembly of the United Nations – if we are to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Meaningful inclusion and participation cannot be achieved if girls are barred, as frequently occurs, from spaces of power, due to their age, gender, or nationality. As a premier girls' leadership organization, Girl Scouts of the United States of America actively promotes, elevates, and includes girls in all levels of our organization, preparing them for the world. We call on the United Nations and Member States to prepare the world for girls by valuing and promoting girls' leadership and working to ensure their meaningful participation at all levels of power and decision-making.

Progress has been made, yet the world still fails to recognize the pivotal role girls play in attaining gender equality. We call on Member States to fulfil the promise

of gender equality by recognizing the full rights of the girl child and acting on the following recommendations:

- Recognize that gender equality cannot be achieved without addressing full rights of the girl child.
- Reaffirm and implement Section L of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- Prioritize the needs of girls from a human rights perspective and recognize that girls' rights are human rights.
- Strongly recommend all levels of governments and law enforcement agencies are educated on girls' rights, and commit to enforcing laws and policies for their protection.
- Commit to the implementation of gender-responsive budgeting with an age-responsive lens to address the unique needs of girls.
- Ensure girls have access to free, safe, quality education that is gender-sensitive, with an emphasis on relevant technological skills and training.
- Implement programs and policies to address gender bias and stigmas at all levels of society, including training for men and boys.
- Partner with civil society to implement non-formal education programs and initiatives on behalf of the girl child.
- Ensure girls have access to and full participation in programs and policies that affect them. Ensure that the United Nations models equal participation by not excluding girls based on their age.

As an organization with over 100 years of commitment to girls' leadership, education, and empowerment, Girl Scouts of the United States of America ensures girls are ready to take on the world. Member States must come together and ensure the world is ready for girls.

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