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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

The Working Group on Girls (WGG) originated in the build-up to the tremendous efforts made in 1995 in the ratification of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action as a global agenda for the empowerment of all women and girls. Initially under the auspices of UNICEF, the Working Group on Girls emerged to grapple with the special needs of girls: to address their unique and specific struggles for equality, access to quality education and productive livelihoods, participation in social and economic life and decision-making, and their right to health and protection from all forms of oppression and violence. Section L of the Beijing Platform for Action represents the efforts of original members of Working Group on Girls to improve the status of the Girl Child by calling on all Member States, non-governmental organizations, local communities, and families to recognize, respect, and uphold the full human rights and value of girls.

Yet while some advancement has occurred, nearly thirty years later, girls remain woefully behind in accessing their full rights, and gains have turned to setbacks in the midst of rising discriminatory attitudes, harassment and sexual violence, harmful cultural practices, early and forced marriage, lack of legal protections, and still unmet or yet to be made commitments to ensuring girls' rights and equal educational and other opportunities to develop their full potential and live a life free from poverty. And for girls who are marginalized - in rural, coastal, remote areas or dense urban communities with little or no access to resources; indigenous girls; girls with disabilities; gender-non-conforming persons; girls who have experienced sexual abuse and exploitation; girls who are restricted by domestic care expectations levelled upon them - the risk of poverty is even greater. Likewise, in the midst of the global pandemic, ongoing climate catastrophes, widespread forced displacement due to conflicts, and increased migration due to food and water insecurity and the need to flee violence and poverty - girls are placed at greater risk of all forms of violence - including the violence of poverty.

The feminization of poverty is clear and is characterized by numerous economic and social factors that keep girls and women disproportionately poor and causes them to experience poverty in different and more debilitating ways than men. The World Social Summit identified poverty eradication as an ethical, social, political, and economic imperative that must be mainstreamed into national policies and actions, addressing poverty in all its dimensions. The Working Group on Girls insists that this cannot be done without mainstreaming a gendered perspective and gender-disaggregated data, and the active participation of girls and women in all efforts to initiate, plan, implement, and evaluate policies and programs that are gender-responsive.

Gender inequality is considered the most common form of inequality throughout the world. We know that it begins before a child is born, plays out in various ways throughout her childhood and carries on to adulthood. From infanticide to malnutrition to lack of healthcare and unequal access to education, it is underscored by attitudes, practices and policies that deny girls their full equality, dignity and agency and contribute to higher rates of poverty.

We know that globally women's income is estimated at 16 per cent lower than men's, and that a fifth of women earn less than a living wage, according to The Borgen Project. We know that significantly more women and girls live below the poverty line, which itself is a poor measure of all that encompasses poverty, because we know: poverty is multidimensional. It is not solely based on income.

We know that women and girls of color are most affected by poverty, particularly in the context of access to educational opportunities and health care, and

poor maternal mortality rates. We also know that childbirth is dangerous for all girls' health and also has great impacts on their education and career progress due to lack of adequate childcare and parenting support. Likewise, "period poverty," including lack of affordable menstrual products and sanitary facilities prevents girls from regular attendance at school and often impedes completion of their education.

We know that domestic and other forms of sexual and emotional violence keep women and girls poor, as they are unable to escape their situations, making it difficult to find or keep work. They often lack access to justice, and experience local judicial systems siding in favor of the perpetrators. All these factors affect their ability to support themselves financially and emotionally. Without a sufficient support network and mental health counselling, some girls report resorting to alcohol and drug usage as a means of attempting to cope.

Girls and women are also disproportionately affected by climate emergencies, suffering higher rates of poverty due to unequal access to environmental and financial resources, public services, and infrastructure according to UN Women's 2021 Beyond Covid-19: Feminist Plan for Sustainability and Social Justice. During and after extreme weather events, girls are at increased risk of violence and exploitation, including sexual and physical abuse, and trafficking. These risks are heightened when collecting food, water, and firewood, or when staying in temporary shelters.

Of the 690 million people who are food insecure in the world right now, 60 percent are women and girls, according to the World Food Program. Growing girls should not have to face hunger at a disproportionate rate. Expectations of girls to fetch water, to cook, care for younger siblings and help to grow food lead to a gendered hunger gap - and not eating enough throughout the day raises the likelihood of illness, stress, depression, and impaired ability to learn. In countries with repressive gender norms, or facing conflict or famine, girls often eat last and least.

Girls are less encouraged to learn and participate in social, economic and political functioning of society, not given full access to the tools that will enable them to engage in learning, reflection, analysis and problem-solving in these areas. They need to determine their own way forward unencumbered by discriminatory restrictions and contribute to planning and decision-making at all levels regarding their lives. "Nothing about us without us." Girls know what they need and deserve the support and skills necessary to living self-sustaining, secure, and stable lives.

The Working Group on Girls stands with girls around the world as we make the following recommendations for addressing the root causes and impacts of poverty on girls, and strengthening institutions and financing to ensure their equality and empowerment:

Increase international commitments to support girls' rights and empowerment included in the Beijing Platform for Action – Section L, Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (and Girls), and report on their implementation in Voluntary National Reviews and State Party Reports on the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Recognize and increase girls' substantial participation, as equal partners and in all their diversity, in the Commission on the Status of Women negotiations, Generation Equality Forum, International Day of the Girl convenings, Office of the Secretary General's Envoy for Youth, Civil Society Dialogues, and ongoing advocacy with Permanent Missions and collaboration with UN agencies. To this end, we also recommend that Permanent Missions consider including girl leaders in their youth delegations, while practicing appropriate child safeguarding.

Include gendered perspective and analysis in all national, regional, and local programs and policies via equitable and meaningful participation of girls in the

development, implementation, and ongoing evaluation of all such policies and programs.

Work at all levels to eliminate patriarchal and biased attitudes, and dismantle unjust structures that hinder the equal advancement of girls to meet their full potential and enjoyment of their human rights in all spheres of society.
