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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

The Working Group on Girls (WGG) is a coalition of organizations formed in the lead-up to the Beijing Conference in 1995, driven by the urgent need to address the unique challenges faced by girls worldwide. By the time they reach adulthood, many of their fundamental rights have already been compromised. A global contingent of women from diverse backgrounds successfully advocated for the inclusion of girls' rights in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, culminating in the unanimous adoption of Section L on the Girl Child by Member States. The WGG's mission continues today as we promote girls' agency and advocate for their human rights in all aspects of their lives.

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action marked an historic moment in recognizing women's rights and the specific needs of girls. It established critical commitments to uphold girls' rights and to address the discrimination, harmful practices, and barriers that prevent their full development and participation in society. As we celebrate progress over the past 30 years, we must also acknowledge that significant challenges remain.

Consulting with girls as experts on their own needs and experiences, we gathered their recommendations on the implementation of Section L. Alarming, girls across all regions report that three decades after the Beijing Declaration, none of the nine strategic objectives for the girl child have been fully achieved. Girls continue to face intersecting forms of discrimination—educational disparities, barriers to health care and information, violence, and economic exploitation—further compounded by biased family dynamics. Despite some social and economic progress, no country has yet achieved full gender equality.

Local reports from girls highlight ongoing discrimination and the need for systemic change in every aspect of their lives. Key recommendations include promoting girls' participation in decision-making on all matters affecting girls, eliminating all forms of violence against girls, ensuring access to quality education, improving reproductive health education and services, increasing access to mental health care, and strengthening family support systems. Additionally, emerging issues like artificial intelligence and climate change need to be addressed from a girls' rights perspective.

Girls encounter multiple barriers to accessing quality education, including socio-cultural, economic, political, and infrastructural factors. These include negative gender norms, early child marriage, female genital mutilation, gender-based violence, financial constraints, inadequate health services and inadequate funding for girls' educational programs. For girls who are migrating, residing in areas of conflict and where climate-related crises are occurring, they experience a disruption or cessation of their education. Additionally, the gender digital divide persists, despite commitments made at the 67th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women to prioritize digital equity to close the gender digital divide. The WGG calls for free, quality, and inclusive primary and secondary education for all girls, that includes digital literacy and STEM education for girls from an early age.

Discrimination and rights violations also intersect to create significant barriers to girls' health and nutrition. Girls often lack knowledge about balanced diets, face economic barriers to healthcare, and are frequently unable to access care due to domestic responsibilities. Their health needs are often neglected, and economic exploitation or family

dynamics can further impede access to critical healthcare services and proper nutrition.

Access to comprehensive sexuality and health education is also limited, preventing girls from making informed decisions about their bodies. Many girls struggle to access basic information about menstruation and menstrual products. The World Bank estimates that 500 million women and girls globally lack adequate facilities for menstrual hygiene management, impacting their health, education, and dignity. This is exacerbated where girls and women are displaced by violence, conflicts, and climate induced crises. Furthermore, stigma surrounding menstruation continues to harm girls' mental health, preventing open discussion and education about their bodies. The WGG report recommends providing comprehensive health education, making menstrual products readily available, and improving sanitation facilities in schools and public spaces.

Mental health services for girls remain woefully inadequate, particularly in low-income and marginalized communities. Systemic barriers such as underfunding and stigma, further limit access. While Strategic Objective L.9 aims to strengthen family roles in improving girls' status, many girls report that their mental health needs are often dismissed. Governments and institutions must prioritize gender-responsive mental health care.

Appallingly, violence against girls remains pervasive in public spaces, schools, homes, workplaces, and online. This violence, which includes physical, verbal, sexual, psychological, and economic abuse, often leads to long-lasting trauma and health issues. Tackling this issue requires addressing all aspects of inequality. Again, for girls who are migrating, residing in conflict-ridden areas or areas experiencing climate crises, vulnerability to all forms of violence is exacerbated. Girls recommend comprehensive education for all members of society on gender-based discrimination, all forms of gender-based violence, and

the negative impact of social media on body image and mental health. They also advocate for mental health services to be integrated into healthcare reforms, with a focus on comprehensive support services for survivors of violence. The WGG report also recommends stronger laws and coordination to address tech-facilitated gender-based violence.

Moreover, the climate crisis disproportionately impacts women and girls. According to The Gender Snapshot 2024, under a worst-case climate scenario, up to 158 million more women and girls could be pushed into extreme poverty by 2050, with nearly half of them in sub-Saharan Africa. Up to 236 million more women and girls may experience food insecurity. Climate-related disasters—such as floods or droughts—also disrupt schooling. Girls are often the first to be pulled from school to help with household duties, particularly in communities where their education is deprioritized. UNESCO estimates that climate change could result in 12 million girls being out of school each year due to climate impacts. Climate-induced displacement further heightens the risk of gender-based violence, exploitation, and trafficking. Additionally, many girls report high levels of climate anxiety about their future. Governments must take critical measures to respond to the climate crisis and address its impacts. The WGG report calls for integrating climate change education into school curricula, along with supporting girls' participation in local, national, and international environmental policy-making processes. Grant programs should be established to fund girls' sustainability initiatives, and mentorship programs should connect girls with professionals in green industries.

The WGG supports girls' calls on governments and institutions to take decisive and immediate action to advance the rights and well-being of girls. These key demands reflect the critical areas where girls continue to face systemic challenges and inequality:

1. Ensure Access to Quality and Inclusive Education:

Eliminate discrimination against girls in education, skills development, and training. Provide digital and financial literacy programs for girls, as well as STEM education. Offer economic support to make education accessible. Ensure schools have adequate sanitation facilities for menstrual hygiene management.

Implement gender-responsive policies that include educating families, communities and youth on gender-based discrimination and the importance of gender equality.

2. Promote Girls' Leadership and Participation:

Governments, institutions and communities must actively promote the full and meaningful participation of girls in all aspects of society, especially in leadership roles. Address negative cultural social norms, involve girls in leadership positions, and ensure their perspectives are included in decision-making.

3. Combat Gender-Based Violence:

Legal frameworks need to be strengthened to eliminate all forms of violence and discrimination against girls. This includes enforcing laws to end harmful practices like child marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM), addressing cyberbullying and harassment, and preventing intimate partner violence. Addressing the long-term effects of violence against girls, including its impact on physical and mental health, and the immediate and long-term effects of violence on girls, especially those in areas of conflict, must be a priority for governments and institutions to ensure their safety and well-being.

4. Invest in Health Services and Care:

Governments must prioritize girls' health, including their reproductive and mental health, ensuring adequate funding and access to quality health services and care for all girls. This includes providing comprehensive health care and support for survivors of violence and integrating mental health care into broader healthcare reforms. It is also essential to address the long-standing stigma surrounding mental health and ensure that girls have the support they need to thrive emotionally and mentally.

5. Address Climate Vulnerabilities:

Policies should protect girls from the disproportionate impact of climate change. Governments must ensure that girls are included in disaster resilience planning and climate education programs, while also safeguarding them from exploitation during crises. Moreover, it is crucial to involve girls in environmental sustainability initiatives and climate action decision-making processes to help them contribute to creating solutions for their futures.

To achieve the strategic goals outlined in Section L, a coordinated multi-stakeholder approach is essential. Governments, multilateral institutions, civil society, and families must integrate girls' recommendations and commit to immediate action. Only by turning words into action can we create a world where every girl can realize her full potential. A girl born in 1995, the year governments made their promises in Beijing, is now a young woman who is yet to experience gender equality in all aspects of her life. Every girl deserves the opportunity to reach her full potential. We cannot afford to fail the girls born today. The time for action is now—girls are not waiting any longer.