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equality, development and peace for the twenty-first  
century”

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United States Inc., Pan Pacific and South East Asia Women’s  
Association, Passionists International, Salvation Army,  
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

### Girls: Breaking Barriers

The empowerment of all girls, including those in rural areas, is critical for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), but extreme poverty, systemic inequalities, and discriminatory practices persist. Despite the commitments enshrined in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), among other laws, resolutions and statements on the empowerment and rights of the girl child, rural girls still face barriers to education, health, and safety. These barriers prevent them from breaking the cycle of poverty, fully enjoying their human rights, and contributing meaningfully to the achievement of the SDGs. The Working Group on Girls, a coalition of seventy non-governmental organizations, with strong grassroots engagement with girls in all regions of the world, urges the international community, including the United Nations and all Member States, to ensure that rural girls are not left behind, and that they are meaningfully engaged in policies that enable them to reach their full potential.

As the Secretary-General noted in his report on The Girl Child ([A/72/218](#)), Member States will need disaggregated data to review progress made towards commitments in Agenda 2030 and other treaties and resolutions, and to ensure that rural girls are included meaningfully in the implementation of the universal, integrated and indivisible development agenda.

### Empowerment of Rural Girls

A vital prerequisite to global development is gender equality. Women's empowerment begins with girls. Too often the deprivations and inequalities suffered by girls are accepted as their preparation for womanhood. The continuity of traditional inequities will make it impossible for girls and women to contribute to the fundamental changes needed for creating more equitable societies and sustainable development. In the case of rural communities in particular, rural women will be instrumental as role models for girls of dynamic leadership to help remove gender-specific barriers in rural areas and villages.

Rural girls need to be included in decision-making at all levels, including at the level of the family, community, and in political processes. The experiences, perspectives and solutions that rural girls bring are unique, and governments have much to benefit from girls' input when policies and programs affecting the wellbeing of societies are under consideration. Rural girls rely on the implementation of the SDGs to be able to flourish, as doors open to their education and empowerment. In addition, as has been repeatedly affirmed at the international level, the empowerment of girls has a 'multiplier effect' — it results in exponential benefit to society as girls are able to contribute and make decisions that affect the social and economic prosperity of all. For example, the empowerment of rural girls leads to reduced chances of early marriage, greater likelihood of girls' informed and active role in family planning, decreased infant and maternal mortality, and enhanced participation of girls in social, economic and political decision-making. These all contribute to the advancement of development processes. We must listen to the voices of girls, include them in our consultations, empower them, build their capacities and embolden them to play an active role in collective life.

## Recommendations

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development presents a framework that, if implemented thoroughly, will enable rural girls to overcome the intersecting barriers they face.

Therefore we call on Member States to:

- Commit to a human rights-based approach in all efforts to empower women and girls, especially in rural areas in line with the commitments expressed in the SDGs.
- Invest in quality education (SDG 4) for girls, which impacts their future access to decent work (SDG 8) by ensuring safe passage to and from school, adequate sanitary facilities within school (SDG 6) and gender equality in curricula, administration, pedagogy, teacher training and policies.
- Promote data collection mechanisms that provide the means to monitor not only school enrolment but also completion of each level — elementary, secondary, and tertiary — of education, as well as the intersecting factors of disability, location, and economic status and their impact on education for girls, especially in rural areas.
- Contribute to the realization of SDG 1 by implementing social protection schemes, including floors (1.3), and to ensure that girls and women have equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to basic services, ownership and control over land and other forms of property, inheritance, natural resources, appropriate new technology and financial services (1.4, 5.a).
- Ensure the health of rural girls by providing assistance to those who face malnutrition (2.2), high rates of maternal mortality and obstetric fistula resulting from child, early and forced marriage (3.1) and other gendered health-related issues.
- Combat stereotypes and cultural norms that perpetuate unequal care and household responsibilities for rural girls (5.4), like water and firewood collection (SDGs 6 and 7).
- Strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards and natural disasters in all countries, including focusing on effective climate change-related planning and management for rural girls (SDG 13).
- Eliminate abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence and torture against girls including harmful traditional practices (16.2).

The future of today's society will depend to a great extent on the manner in which governments, communities, educational programs and families are allowing for the release of the latent potential of our younger generations and prepare them for the world they will inherit. Rural girls must see themselves as active agents of their own development and as a driving force of an ongoing effort to continually improve their condition and to contribute to the betterment of their communities.