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**Amnesty International**  
**Oral statement at the 57th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)**

We welcome the focus in this year's CSW on ending and preventing all forms of violence against women and girls. They are turning to you - Member States - to send a clear signal of global resolve and commitment to put an end to their suffering, to ensure accountability for violations of their rights, to prevent violence in the future and to engage women and girls as agents of change. Member States and NGOs must all put their weight behind ending violence against women and girls. As a global human rights movement, Amnesty International reminds the Commission of the imperative of a rights based approach, and calls on you to express your resolve by ensuring that the Agreed Conclusions:

**1. Acknowledge that gender discrimination is a cause and a consequence of violence, and recognise that gender equality and women's empowerment is an important part of the solution**

Failing to acknowledge the gender-based nature of such violence only hampers efforts at preventing and eliminating it. The agreed conclusions must recognise all forms of gender-based violence against women, including intimate partner violence and marital rape.

**2. Acknowledge and respond to the lived realities of all girls and women, in all their diversity**

The agreed conclusions should call on States to respond effectively to ensure that all women and girls benefit from prevention and response mechanisms to gender-based violence. It is of crucial importance that references in the agreed conclusions to specific groups at risk are inclusive of all women and girls who experience discrimination, including those who face discrimination based on their sexual orientation and gender identity. This group is known to be exposed to particular risks of gender-based violence, and are affected by non-existent or particularly ineffective responses to violence.

**3. Ensure full human rights scrutiny and accountability**

UN Member States have all ratified various international and regional human rights instruments and have adopted national laws that contain clear obligations to respect, protect and fulfil women's human rights. The agreed conclusions must therefore call for effective implementation of this legal framework. There is no doubt that cultural, religious and traditional values and practices can play a positive role in efforts to eliminate and prevent violence against women and girls. However, international human rights standards are clear: custom, tradition, religious or other consideration and national sovereignty may not be invoked to avoid the obligation of states.

**4. Craft effective measures with sexual and reproductive rights at the heart**

The agreed conclusions must affirm governments' commitments to sexual and reproductive rights for all, including by reaffirming the ICPD Programme of Action standards. Unless women and girls enjoy their sexual and reproductive rights - including the right to make autonomous decisions about their sexual and reproductive lives - violence against women will persist. Responses to gender-based violence can only be effective if women and girls have access to comprehensive and quality sexual and reproductive health services, information and education. Access needs to be truly inclusive for all

groups, including adolescents. It must be comprehensive in all its aspects, and not exclude, for instance, safe and legal abortion as an option for girls and women pregnant as a result of rape.

#### **5. Support and protect women human rights defenders**

Amnesty International is deeply concerned about violence committed against women human rights defenders (WHRDs). They are an essential part of any healthy civil society, as they challenge structures, norms and traditions that discriminate against and marginalise so many. WHRDs are targeted both because of their gender and because of their work defending all human rights, including women's human rights. WHRDs, their colleagues and their families can face violence in their homes, their communities and by state and non-state actors. And too often the perpetrators of these violations enjoy impunity for their actions. Amnesty International urges all Member States to use this CSW as an opportunity to affirm their commitments to support and protect WHRDs, so that they can carry out their important work without fear of reprisals, coercion, intimidation or attacks.

In closing, we stress that despite the commitments made, progress has been too slow in eradicating violence against women and girls. The CSW is an important opportunity for States to show they're ready to redouble their efforts, through clear, practical, concrete, measurable and time-bound commitments, as required by their legal obligations. We owe it to women and girls around the world to show resolve in ending violence once and for all.

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