

Joint Statement of the Young Women's Caucus –World YWCA and WAGGGS.

We, the young women's caucus, are the voice of the 860 million young women and girls around the world. Violence against girls and women has been described as 'one of the most heinous, systematic and prevalent human rights abuses in the world' by UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon. Violence against young women and girls includes but is not limited to physical, verbal, sexual, psychological, emotional and economic violence, as well as harmful cultural, traditional and religious practices and all forms of discrimination and exploitation. Furthermore, the young women's caucus recognises occupation and conflict as forms of violence that impact the lives of girls and young women, and exacerbate gender-based violence.

Girls and young women are particularly vulnerable to violence as they face the double discrimination of both their gender and age. Girls and young women are also vulnerable to escalating trends of violence, including urban gang, media and virtual violence. We have grave concern about the high level of violence perpetuated through the media, including social media, which has facilitated the rise of cyber bullying and the sexual exploitation of women and girls. We call for increased attention to ensuring laws and monitoring systems are in place to combat this. There is also a need to educate media professionals to avoid reinforcing gender stereotypes and to reduce the sexualisation of girls and young women.

Unequal gender roles which are ingrained in societies impact the ways that girls and young women understand violence. Often violence is so normalised that girls and young women accept it and even condone it. Gender discrimination has also resulted in attitudes that place blame on the victims of violence.

We testify that through addressing the root cause of violence against girls and young women; then gender inequality, discrimination and violence against all women will be eliminated.

The young women's caucus calls for increased efforts through sustainable investment and implementation of programmes that address the root causes of violence. Strategies need to include age-appropriate programmes and support services that targets the needs of high risk groups of girls and young women and girls and boys within the formal and non-formal education systems.

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Culture, tradition and religion should never be used as an excuse to justify violence such as female genital mutilation and early and forced marriage. Legislation, law enforcement and education targeting community leaders, parents and girls are essential for the eradication of FGM and early and forced marriage. The Young women's caucus brings forward the YWCA's petition with more than 4000 signatures calling on the UN to adopt a resolution on child, early and forced marriage.

Economic empowerment is a key tool in the prevention of violence against girls and young women by enabling women to have financial independence and choices. We know families living in extreme poverty sell their daughters into trafficking, forced-marriage or domestic servitude for economic reasons. We call for increased efforts to eliminate poverty and organised trafficking networks.

Young women are one of the most powerful driving forces to improve lives and transform communities. We call upon the United Nations to ensure that the post-2015 development agenda include a strong emphasis on the elimination of all forms of violence against girls, young women and women as well as securing peace with justice and respect for fundamental human rights.