

Graduate Women International

64th session of the Commission on the Status of Women statement addressing progress made towards the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action

Graduate Women International (GWI), with the endorsement by the undersigned non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council, present the following written statement to the 64th session of the Commission on the Status of Women:

The rate of progress towards implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action agreed upon by 189 Member States in 1995 to “take all necessary measures to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and the girl child” is advancing significantly slower than anticipated.

GWI suggests that due to lacklustre commitment by Member States the interconnectedness between political will and allocation of funding is disregarded. GWI urges Member States to use this 25-year benchmark as an opportunity to raise their level of ambition towards action on the realisation of the Beijing Platform for Action and its 12 Critical Areas of Concern. And, also to take note of the recommendations from subject expert NGOs, many of whom have been advocating for the same gender equality issues for more than 25 years.

For 100 years, GWI has been advocating for women and girls’ rights to education. Century-long advocacy work, together with its National Federations and Associations, and in collaboration with civil society and NGOs in countries around the world, has contributed to more women and girls having access to traditional education and non-traditional training than ever. Noting this progress, GWI underscores that these achievements are continuously under jeopardy. Women and girls continue to face unprecedented challenges to longstanding barriers to education with new threats such as digital illiteracy and cyberbullying, climate change, the rise of violent extremism and the increased number of refugees looming.

Optimistically, GWI adopted 110 resolutions since the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in 1995 aimed towards lifelong education for women and girls. These resolutions range from the elimination of gender-based violence to cultural diversity in education; from education for indigenous women to schools in conflict areas; from human trafficking to human rights of refugees; from women in leadership to women in peace processes; and from girls in science and financial literacy to globalisation effects on women and girls.

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action establishes that education is a human right and an essential tool for achieving the goals of equality, development and peace. GWI declares that the basic literacy and numeracy skills developed in primary school are insufficient to equip girls with the knowledge and skills they need to realise their full potential. Consequently, GWI advocates for

four post-primary steps of education: secondary, tertiary, continuing and non-traditional education.

Post-primary education gives girls and young women the academic and personal tools that are vital to progressing further in higher education, work and society; equips them with high-level academic knowledge and qualifications; enables the uptake of professional positions and increases earning potential; enhances social inclusion and personal development; and is both a means of empowerment and an investment in tomorrow's future leaders and decision-makers.

GWI calls on all Member States and education sectors to take collective responsibility to:

- Ensure that cultural and traditional practices do not detract from girls' and women's right to access post-primary education. This includes eliminating female genital mutilation, menstrual hygiene insecurity and harmful practices against widows.
- Increase protection for victims of violence and culture practices by adopting national legislation that also fully contributes to the success of the Sustainable Development Goals.
- Commit to female teacher recruitment and training to meet an imminent global shortfall; appropriately train teachers for indigenous, disabled, language minorities and other vulnerable groups.
- Ensure access to post-primary education in those sectors of society where women and girls are most marginalised through natural disaster, war, migration and post-conflict dislocation.
- Include reporting procedures for gender-based violence when experienced on school premises or while travelling to or from school.

The Girl Child, a special focus of GWI advocacy, is one of the 12 Critical Areas of Concern in the Beijing Platform for Action. Available indicators therein show that the girl child is discriminated against from the earliest stages of life, through her childhood and into adulthood. Subsequently, GWI adopted two resolutions (2013 and 2016 respectively) to raise awareness about the negative impacts on girls' education, of early and forced child marriage and ritual abuse. As related to the girl child, GWI urges States to collaborate with NGO experts to achieve:

- One hundred per cent ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols.
- Worldwide implementation of other international treaties concerning the girl child.
- Elimination of harmful cultural and socio norms and practices against girls.
- Full realisation of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) General recommendation No. 36 (2017) on the right of girls and women to education.

GWJ also remains deeply concerned about the varying types of violence against women and Gender-Based Violence and underscores that violence destabilises the safety, dignity, health, and human rights of the millions of women and girls. The first action towards eliminating Gender-Based Violence is to draw attention to the frequency of its incidents and spread awareness about the issue and to view organisations as agents of change towards the elimination of the violence, locally and globally. GWJ believes that as a civilization, we are at a critical moment in time when we must acknowledge, once and for all, that the safety of women girls is a cornerstone of a sustainable society. We call on all men and women and Member States to:

- Strenuously reject all notions that tend to justify Gender-Based Violence.
- Punish its perpetrators to the full extent of the law.
- Advocate for strict laws where there are none.

Gender-Based Violence in the world of work is one of the most important and widespread obstacles to women's economic empowerment, autonomy and independence – and to the realisation of gender equality. As an organisation committed to the empowerment of all women and girls, GWJ calls for the urgent establishment of much needed internationally agreed laws and regulations tackling the many different forms of Gender-Based Violence in the workplace.

To this point, GWJ is encouraged by the standard-setting International Labour Organisation who created new Instrument on Violence and Harassment in the World of Work. GWJ supports this vital instrument and urges for the final instrument to be a legally binding convention supplemented by a recommendation.

Violence against women is particularly apparent in armed conflict situations. To this end, GWJ has adopted 15 resolutions during the past 25 years to address the issue; such as calling for the elimination of child soldiers and protection of women and girls in conflict areas. Alternately, women are underrepresented in peace processes. However, when women are involved, the likelihood that a peace agreement will last longer than 15 years increases by up to 35 per cent according to UN Women.

In summary and in addition to the aforementioned recommendations, GWJ urges member states to:

- Invest in financial literacy training for women at a young age.
- Collaborate with all stakeholders and to contribute their full support for a greater impact towards eliminating Gender-Based Violence.
- Increase the participation of women in conflict resolution at decision-making levels; promote women's contribution to fostering a culture of peace.
- Challenge established barriers to women's economic empowerment and participation in positions of leadership and decision-making.
- Adopt institutional mechanisms at all levels to guide the advancement of women and girls and include women in policy and decision-making processes.

GWI represents member affiliates at all United Nations offices and participates annually in the Commission on the Status of Women to inform policymakers and other stakeholders on issues related to education, gender and human rights. GWI, with headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland, collaborates with member affiliates in 55 countries, independent members in more than 16 countries, and NGO and civil society organisations who strive for the advancement of women's rights through education and women's inclusion in decision-making positions at all levels and lifelong learning up to the highest level. GWI is committed to the success of the Sustainable Development Goals and the further implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in collaboration with all stakeholders, governments, academia, civil society and NGOs.