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**United Nations Population Fund**



**Economic Commission for Africa (ECA)**

# **Adolescent Girls and Their Rights**

**Expert Group Meeting**

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia  
13 - 17 October 1997

**REPORT**

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## CONTENTS

|  | <u>Paragraphs</u> |
|--|-------------------|
| Preface  |                   |
| I. Organization of work .....  | 1 - 18            |
| A. Attendance .....  | 1 - 2             |
| B. Documentation .....   | 3                 |
| C. Adoption of the agenda .....  | 4                 |
| D. Election of officers .....  | 5                 |
| E. Opening statements .....  | 6 - 14            |
| F. Working groups .....  | 15 - 18           |
| II. Summary of debate .....  | 19 - 51           |
| A. Adolescent girls in need of special protection .....  | 27 - 36           |
| B. Health of adolescent girls including reproductive and<br>sexual health and nutrition .....                        | 37 - 44           |
| C. Creating an enabling environment for the realization of<br>human rights and empowerment of adolescent girls ..... | 45 - 51           |
| III. Conclusions and recommendations .....   | 52 - 117          |
| A. General conclusions and recommendations .....   | 53 - 63           |
| B. Area-specific conclusions and recommendations .....   | 64 - 117          |
| 1. Adolescent girls in need of special protection .....  | 64 - 75           |
| 2. Health of adolescent girls including reproductive<br>and sexual health and nutrition .....                        | 76 - 108          |
| 3. Creating an enabling environment for the realization<br>of human rights and empowerment of adolescent girls ..... | 109 - 117         |
| Annexes  | <u>Pages</u>      |
| I. List of participants .....  | 35 - 40           |
| II. List of documents .....  | 41 - 43           |
| III. Agenda of the meeting .....   | 44 - 46           |
| IV. Composition of working groups .....  | 47                |

## Preface

The Expert Group Meeting on “Adolescent Girls and their Rights” was organized in accordance with the provisions of the Beijing Platform for Action. The Platform underlines that “discrimination and neglect in childhood can initiate a lifelong downward spiral of deprivation and exclusion from the social mainstream” (paragraph 260). The Platform recommends that “initiatives be taken to prepare girls to participate actively, effectively and equally with boys at all levels of social, economic, political and cultural leadership” (paragraph 260). Governments and actors of civil society are called upon to eliminate all forms of discrimination against girls, *inter alia*, in the areas of education, skills development and training and health care. Furthermore, they are called upon to eliminate negative cultural attitudes and practices against girls, and protect their rights and increase awareness of girls’ needs and potential.

As part of preparation for the forthcoming forty-second session of the Commission on the Status of Women, the Expert Group Meeting was organized jointly by the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW), the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA). This cooperation was a reflection of the interagency commitment to mainstream a gender perspective throughout the United Nations system. Furthermore, it made it possible to examine the topic and evaluate the implementation process of the Beijing Platform for Action from three different perspectives: (i) adolescent girls in need of special protection (as defined by the United Nations Children’s Fund); (ii) health of adolescent girls, including reproductive and sexual health and nutrition; and (iii) creating an enabling environment for the realization of human rights and empowerment of adolescent girls. The meeting also gave due emphasis to the situation of adolescent girls in the African region in all three areas.

## I. ORGANIZATION OF WORK

### A. Attendance

1. The Expert Group Meeting on "Adolescent Girls and their Rights" was held at the Economic Commission for Africa, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, from 13 to 17 October 1997. It was jointly organized by the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women/Department for Economic and Social Affairs (DAW/DESA), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA).
2. The Meeting was attended by nine experts representing all geo-political regions, and 53 observers: 25 from Governments, two from inter-governmental organizations, 16 from the United Nations system and 10 from non-governmental organizations (see annex I for the full list of participants).

### B. Documentation

3. The documentation of the Meeting comprised two background papers prepared by DAW and UNICEF; 10 experts's papers; two observers' statements and 10 reference papers prepared for other purposes and submitted because of their relevance (see annex II).

### C. Adoption of the agenda

4. At its opening session on 13 October 1997 the Meeting adopted the agenda as follows (see annex III):
  - Opening ceremony
  - Election of officers
  - Adoption of the agenda
  - Panel discussions:
    - Adolescent girls in need of special protection
    - Health of adolescent girls, including reproductive and sexual health and nutrition
    - Creating an enabling environment for the realization of human rights and empowerment of adolescent girls
  - Working group discussions on the above three themes
  - Conclusion of working group discussions
  - Drafting of the report
  - Adoption of reports from working groups
  - Adoption of the EGM's report
  - Closing of the meeting.

#### D. Election of officers

5. At its opening session the Meeting elected the following officers to the Bureau:

|                  |  |
|------------------|--|
| Chairperson      | Prof. Savitri W.E. Goonesekere (Sri Lanka) |
| Vice-Chairperson | Ms. Jane A. Kwawu (Ghana)                  |
| Rapporteur       | Dr. Herbert L. Friedman (USA)              |

#### E. Opening statements

6. The Expert Group Meeting was opened by Ms. Josephine Ouedraogo, Director, African Centre for Women of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, who welcomed the participants and emphasized the importance of holding this Meeting at the Economic Commission for Africa.

7. In her opening statement, Ms. Angela E. V. King, Assistant Secretary-General and Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, welcomed the participants on behalf of the Secretary-General and expressed her appreciation to the Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa for hosting the Meeting, and also thanked the other partners, the United Nations Children's Fund and the United Nations Population Fund, for their cooperation and the commitment to the cause of gender equality and improvement of the situation of adolescent girls.

8. The Assistant Secretary-General referred to the recent situation of the African continent where the international community has observed armed conflicts with devastating consequences, and stressed that the Expert Group Meeting would discuss global strategies to ensure that girls were not victimized in this way. She commended the Economic Commission for Africa for its devoted efforts in promoting social, economic, political and legal equality of women and girls in Africa. She further recalled that it was African women who demanded that international attention be given to the situation of girls worldwide by insisting on the inclusion of the girl-child as one of the critical areas of concern in the Beijing Platform for Action. She also recalled how their commitment was further emphasized at the First Summit of African First Ladies for Peace and Humanitarian Issues held in Abuja, Nigeria, 5-7 May 1997.

9. She further noted that despite the various international commitments and agreements that recognized the need to achieve equality between girls and boys, girls were still subjected to discrimination through their childhood and into adulthood. She pointed out to a crucial link between the well-being of today's girls and the status of tomorrow's women and emphasized that adolescence was the period of physical and emotional transition from childhood to adulthood which was critical for personal development and for establishing their position and roles in society. Yet, few studies have focussed on adolescent girls or sought to explore ways to redress the situation.

10. The Assistant Secretary-General noted that the Expert Group Meeting was expected to aid a better understanding of the situations of adolescent girls and the enjoyment of their rights, and to assess the progress made in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in this area. She further recalled that the issues of the girl-child would be taken up by the Commission on the Status of Women at its forty-second session in March 1998 as part of its commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the signing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. She expressed hope that the Expert Group Meeting would elaborate action-oriented measures that would facilitate the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and guide all actors of society to respect, protect and promote the rights of adolescent girls and to create an enabling environment for their empowerment.

11. In his opening statement, Mr. K.Y. Amoako, the Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa, reiterated the importance of addressing the rights of adolescent girls in the context of Africa's economic, social and political development. He noted that adolescent girls in Africa were subjected to profound disadvantages, and highlighted some of the relevant statistics. He further stated that while it was increasingly recognized that the investment in girls would help reduce poverty, slow the population explosion and promote economic growth, the world, including the region of Africa, continued to deprive girls and women of the opportunities to benefit from development, or even to contribute fully to its process.

12. The Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission reiterated his commitment to promote gender equality in Africa. The Commission recently strengthened its capacity to mainstream a gender perspective into all aspects of its work programmes and made gender a crosscutting issue in its policies and programmes. The Commission also began preparing for a major consultation conference entitled "Forging Partnerships for Africa's Future: Gender Perspectives".

13. The Executive Secretary called for measures to be taken in modifying laws and regulations to ensure equal opportunity for girls, formulating gender-sensitive macro- and micro- economic policies, revising national budgets to secure investment in girls and introducing affirmative actions where wide disparities persisted. He further touched upon the importance of citizenship training for girls and their access to information and participation in the information flow.

14. In his opening statement, Mr. Marcel Diouf, representing the Organization of African Unity, welcomed the participants and expressed his appreciation for the joint effort of four United Nations entities which brought the Meeting to Ethiopia. He also stressed the importance of hosting this Meeting in Africa. He further stated that the recommendations of the Meeting should guide African countries in their continuing efforts to implement the Beijing Platform for Action.

#### **F. Working groups**

15. The working groups were organized around the three major themes as follows:

- (i) Adolescent girls in need of special protection;

- (ii) Health of adolescent girls, including reproductive and sexual health and nutrition;
- (iii) Enabling environment for the empowerment of adolescent girls.

The composition of all working groups is listed in annex IV.

16. Working group 1 discussed the situation of adolescent girls in need of special protection. The discussion was moderated by Ms. Mary H. Purcell (Working Group on Girls/NGO Committee for UNICEF), and Ms. Anitha Rönström (expert) served as the rapporteur. Ms. Sree Gururaja, UNICEF, assisted the work of the group.

17. Working group 2 discussed the issues of health of adolescent girls, including reproductive and sexual health and nutrition. The discussion was moderated by Dr. Herbert Friedman (expert), and Ms. Jane Kwawu (expert) served as the rapporteur. Mr. James Chui, UNFPA, assisted the work of the group.

18. Working Group 3 discussed the issues of creating an enabling environment for the realization of human rights and empowerment of adolescent girls. The discussion was moderated by Prof. Savitri Goonesekere (expert), and Ms. Bani Dugal Gujral (Baha'i International Community) served as the rapporteur. Ms. Dorota Gierycz, DAW/DESA, assisted the work of the group.

## II. SUMMARY OF DEBATE

19. The issue of the girl-child was firmly placed on the international agenda by the 1990 Declaration of the World Summit for Children which accorded priority attention to the girl child for survival, development and protection. The Programme of Action, adopted by the international community at the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo in 1994, highlighted the need to improve the situation of the girl-child, to eliminate all forms of discrimination against her, and to increase public awareness of her value. The Regional Conference on Women, held in Dakar in November 1994, in preparation for the Fourth World Conference on Women, adopted the African Platform for Action which clearly identified the crucial link between the well-being of today's girls and the status of tomorrow's women. Consequently, the Beijing Platform for Action, adopted at the Fourth World Conference of Women, included "the girl-child" in its twelve critical areas of concern.

20. The international community has acknowledged that the equal rights of girls and the equal participation of women in the social, cultural, economic and political life of societies is a prerequisite for successful and sustainable development. For those countries who have ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the achievement of equality between girls and boys and the elimination of discrimination against girls are legal obligations.

21. The Beijing Platform for Action seeks to promote and protect the full realization of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of women throughout their life-cycle. The Platform identifies twelve critical areas of concern in which major actions are designed to overcome the existing obstacles and to advance the status of women. The chapter on the girl-child, one of the critical areas of concern, recognizes that in many countries the girl-child faces discrimination in all stages of life, from birth, through childhood and into adulthood despite the progress in advancing the status of women worldwide. The Platform argues that due to this discriminatory environment, girls often receive limited opportunities for education and consequently lack knowledge and the skills needed to advance their status in society. The Platform underscores the responsibility of Governments to protect and promote the rights of the girls and recommends eliminating all barriers in order to enable girls to develop their full potential and skills through equal access to education and training, nutrition, physical and mental health care and related information. The Platform also notes that girls are less encouraged than boys to participate in and learn about the social, economic and political functioning of society and urges Governments to take action to provide access for girls to training and information to enable them to articulate their views, and to promote the equality and participation of girls in society.
22. Since the Fourth World Conference on Women, greater attention has been paid at all levels by Governments, the United Nations system and other international institutions and non-governmental organizations to the needs of girl children. However, not enough action was taken to redress the discrimination and difficulties they face, in particular during adolescence. Adolescents are caught between childhood and adulthood, in terms of their social status and physical development. Adolescent girls have needs that differ significantly from those of boys because of their expected biological and social roles, and are often discriminated on the accounts of both their age and their sex.
23. In order to contribute toward a better understanding of the factors affecting the situation of adolescent girls and their rights the present Expert Group Meeting was convened. It allowed consideration of these issues in a human rights context. The Meeting recognized that improvement of the situation of adolescent girls cannot be made without realizing both the civil rights and socio-economic rights guaranteed by international treaties including the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.
24. The Meeting provided an opportunity to assess progress in implementation of the relevant provisions of the Beijing Platform for Action, in order to provide substantive input to the report on the subject which will be submitted to the Commission on the Status of Women at its forty-second session in March 1998 and to contribute to the Commission's debate on "the girl-child". The meeting proposed action-oriented measures aimed at the accelerated implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in this important area.
25. The Expert Group Meeting identified the following predisposing and determining factors which contribute to the vulnerable situation of adolescent girls:

- The slow pace of dissemination and implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women;
- The low and unequal status accorded to girls and women from birth resulting in low self-esteem among girls;
- Poverty in the high proportion of female-headed households and poor access to basic services;
- Lack of social policies which recognize the situation of adolescent girls and the girl-child in general;
- Urbanization, the social impact of globalization and structural adjustment policies.

26. The Expert Group Meeting noted that the rights of adolescent girls should be seen as an integral part of human rights and that girls be enabled to develop fully and contribute to all spheres of life. They need to be given the skills and knowledge which contribute to their self-esteem in order to become more self-reliant and be active participants in society. The Meeting focused on the following critical aspects relevant to improving the situation of adolescent girls:

- Adolescent girls in need of special protection, which include girls in armed conflict situations; refugee girls; girls who are sexually exploited; girls with disability; working girls; girls living in conditions of temporary or permanent loss of family and/or primary care givers and; girls affected by deficient laws and abusive legal and judicial processes;
- Health, including reproductive and sexual health and nutrition;
- Creating an enabling environment for the empowerment of adolescent girls.

#### **A. Adolescent girls in need of special protection**

27. The rights of girls are enshrined in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Both Conventions contain mutually reinforcing principles which, if fully implemented, would ensure the protection and fulfillment of the rights of girls and put an end to gender-based discrimination. Although adolescent girls have special needs and face many especially difficult circumstances on the way to womanhood, their specific situation and needs remain largely ignored and neglected.

28. The papers presented by the experts focused on ways to strengthen the implementation of existing binding treaties under international law especially the CRC and the CEDAW, in order

to protect adolescent girls in especially difficult circumstances, and to prevent or ameliorate their problems and ensure the implementation of their human rights. While some 191 countries have ratified the CRC and some 166 countries have ratified the CEDAW, there remains a large gap between the State obligations resulting from those Conventions and their reflection in national legislation and effective implementation. The increasingly important role of NGOs in supporting implementation of these instruments has been noted.

29. The papers also discussed measures to be taken by Governments, local authorities, NGOs and other responsible groups in society for the protection of adolescent girls and to address their developmental needs. They identified and highlighted examples and best practices that demonstrate what can be done to meet the needs and ensure protection of adolescent girls in need of special protection.

30. Globalization, poverty, erosion of values, and family and community ties made adolescent girls increasingly exposed to the sex industry, child pornography, trafficking in women and children. These phenomena were neither confronted with adequate legal and political measures at national and international levels, nor sufficiently addressed by civil society.

31. Although the situation varies greatly from region to region and even within countries, a common thread seems to be the lower value ascribed to girls in relation to boys in virtually all countries. In addition, rapid urbanization, growing economic disparities between rich and poor and especially between the resources women and men control, gender-based violence and armed conflict exacerbate the already distressing situation of adolescent girls.

32. For many girls, discrimination often starts within their families and extends to affect their educational opportunities and all other spheres of their lives. Their powerlessness to protect themselves from sexual assault, early child bearing, exploitation and abuse, and the effects of war and armed conflict robs them of the chance to enjoy their childhood and develop their full potential. The extent of their individual suffering is often hidden by the overwhelming numbers of those affected.

33. The rapid transmission of HIV/AIDS is a new threat to millions of adolescent girls around the world, especially those who are exploited in the sex industry. Even a greater number of girls are losing their parents and primary care givers to HIV/AIDS and also find themselves forced to assume responsibility for younger siblings.

34. Attention was given to adolescent girls who worked at home and were often exploited and deprived of their rights, benefits and opportunities which other adolescent girls enjoyed such as access to education, training and social interaction.

35. There are many groups of adolescent girls in need of special protection. They include:

- Girls with disabilities, further exacerbated as they become adolescent and often neglected in favour of younger siblings;

- Girls in armed conflict, including combatants and refugees;
- Orphaned girls through AIDS, maternal mortality or conflict and who lack any care giver;
- Girls subject to sexual abuse whose mothers are abroad as migrant workers;
- Girls in conflict with the law;
- Sexually abused girls including victims of incest, rape, forced prostitution and sexual harassment;
- Girls subjected to female genital mutilation (FGM) or suffering from fistula, often subsequently ostracized, and devalued if they were not able to be wives or mothers;
- Girls obliged to marry too early and consequently bear children at young age who are more likely to suffer from maternal morbidity or mortality as well as a curtailment of other opportunities;
- Girls affected by the dowry or “bride price” systems;
- Girls abducted by men, including soldiers, for marriage or sexual exploitation;
- Girls used as subjects of child pornography which may cause them lasting damage;
- Girls working under hazardous and exploitative conditions;
- Migrant girls who cross international borders.

36. Violence against adolescent girls is often hidden. Yet there is evidence to indicate that it is widespread, and some young people even assume it to be the norm. The need for proper legislation, awareness raising and education on the rights of girls and young women is not sufficiently recognized by planners and policy makers.

#### **B. Health of adolescent girls including reproductive and sexual health and nutrition**

37. Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease and infirmity. The health of adolescents is intimately linked to their development. Changing global conditions are placing greater strains on young people modifying their behaviours and relationships which are increasingly exacerbating some health problems. These health problems often fall on the young girls who are disadvantaged due to their age, gender and low economic status.

38. Adolescent girls who are no longer children but not yet women, are denied rights and protections available to adult women. Because of their gender, they often suffer culture-bound violations and are exploited, abused, and denied opportunities more available to adolescent boys. When they live in impoverished settings, they lack access to the health services, education, and gainful employment, all issues that have an impact on their health and well-being.

39. Building on the international standards set by the CRC and the CEDAW and the consensus reached in the ICPD Programme of Action and the Beijing Platform for Action which have recognized the rights of adolescent girls to reproductive and sexual health, including information, counselling and services, attention was drawn to the responsibilities of parents, communities, Governments and international organizations in this regard. The importance of the active involvement of men and boys in this process was emphasized.

40. In the light of systematic discrimination against girls in many societies as well as the conditions that force girls into early marriage and childbearing, emphasis was placed on the critical need for self-reliance and empowerment of adolescent girls. It is also necessary that girls be helped to resist pressure to provide sexual favours in exchange of material goods, and to challenge the attitudes to adolescent girls as "sex objects". The need for relevant in and out of school programmes and open, informed discussion of the adolescent girls' reproductive and sexual health was recognized as an important way to reduce their problems with peers, parents, and medical personnel. Programmes are needed to raise their self-esteem, develop support networks and re-examine the roles and impacts of existing institutions and country-based organizations.

41. Particular concerns expressed with regard to some health problems which particularly affect adolescent girls include:

- Malnutrition, anaemia;
- Sexual and reproductive health including FGM, too early and unwanted pregnancy, adolescent maternal morbidity and mortality, unsafe abortion, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), HIV/AIDS;
- Violence, including sexual abuse and incest;
- Mental health;
- Substance abuse including the use of tobacco, alcohol and other drugs.

42. While some progress has been made in putting the needs of adolescent girls on the agenda of Governments, international organizations and NGOs, much more needs to be done. Many programmes have been effective while others have failed, but even the successful ones tend to be small scale. The need for new, effective means to address those issues was stressed.

43. The Meeting identified critical obstacles to adolescent girls health, including nutrition and reproductive and sexual health, including:

- The reluctance of society at large to address adolescent girls' reproductive and sexual health;
- The lack of knowledge, information and skills among young people;
- The lack of health provisions, including counselling services in all sectors designed for adolescents;
- The lack of training for service providers and educators who interact with young people, especially in sensitive areas such as sexuality which require skills in confidential counselling;
- National policies, laws and practices which can be restrictive and/or inconsistent, or those of which the general public is not aware, or those that are inefficiently implemented, and/or those which often limit the access of young people to services and information, for example, by requiring consent of another party;
- Absence of national strategies for the health of young people which could provide a framework for health care;
- Inadequate support from the donor community.

44. It was recognized that interventions are needed in five major areas to improve the situation as indicated in the "WHO/UNFPA/UNICEF document entitled "Action for Adolescent Health: Towards a Common Agenda" drawn from the Study Group on Programming for Adolescent Health.<sup>1</sup> These are:

- The provision of information;
- Strengthening skills;
- Access to quality health services;
- Provision of counselling;

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<sup>1</sup>In November 1995, WHO, UNFPA and UNICEF jointly convened a Study Group on Programming for Adolescent Health. The experts reviewed the latest knowledge, and made recommendations on priority actions to accelerate and strengthen programming for adolescent health, including the global and regional support needed for country-level programming. The recommendations are contained in a popular version of a joint WHO/UNFPA/UNICEF document entitled "Action for Adolescent Health: Towards a Common Agenda". A Technical Report is forthcoming.

- A safe and supportive environment.

**C. Creating an enabling environment for the realization of human rights and empowerment of adolescent girls**

45. Despite the critical importance of the adolescent period in a woman's life, until recently, little effort has been made to accurately address and analyse the specific situation and needs of adolescent girls with an aim to realize their rights. Following the United Nations Decade for Women 1976 to 1985, when data on women began to be increasingly collected and disaggregated by sex, children continued to be profiled as a collective entity, with the exception of data on schooling. Lack of sex and age disaggregated data on adolescent girls was a limitation to analysis, making it difficult to accurately define and assess their status. Later developments in regard to realizing the human rights of women and children have not sufficiently helped to give priority to issues concerning adolescent girls. It was noted that very few States parties reporting on the CRC or the CEDAW analyse or discuss adolescent girls. There is an urgent need for research in this area and the compilation of sex and age disaggregated data will help to deepen the understanding of the situation of adolescent girls, their status and the achievement of gender equality among the international community.

46. Accurate information is particularly important when analysing the enabling environment for the empowerment of adolescent girls to exercise their rights, as it encompasses a wide range of aspects, including education, socialization, mass media, human rights and preparation for participation in social and political life as full citizens.

47. Girls continue to be undervalued both by society and by themselves and suffer from low self-esteem which prevents them from realizing their full potential. This could lead to the detriment, not only of themselves, but to society as a whole.

48. There are many contributing factors to these problems including poverty, social policies which are inadequate for addressing the development of adolescent girls, stereotyping of adolescent girls in negative images in the mass media which tend to portray girls as passive, or as victims or sex objects. Teachers, textbooks and educational materials often perpetuate these same stereotypes of girls as passive and destined to serve others. Girls are not given sufficient opportunity for full education and training to equip them for a wide variety of potential roles in life. They are not provided with opportunities for non-traditional jobs and are not prepared for responsible decision-making and participation in matters which affect their lives or the community.

49. Girls are often forced to drop out of school because of pregnancy, violence or for economic reasons. These problems sometimes lead parents to keep them from continuing in school or to disrupt their education.

50. Laws are often contradictory and derived from different sources in society. Commonly the "law" that is least favourable to the girl is applied. Even in countries with legal systems which provide for de jure equality, de facto discrimination of adolescent girls prevails.

51. The family, including the male family members, has a crucial role to play. Gender roles are predisposed from birth and perpetuated in the family. The male-female relationships in the family need to be redressed to serve as role models for girls and boys. However, one of the difficulties which needs to be overcome is reaching families to help them appreciate the value to them and to society of investing in the complete education and training of girls as well as boys.

### III. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

52. The Expert Group Meeting, having considered the three themes under discussion, recognized the inter-relatedness of the themes as well as the need to promote the rights of the girl-child in a holistic manner. Accordingly a list of General conclusions and recommendations which are cross-cutting and applicable for all three themes was adopted.

#### A. General conclusions and recommendations

53. The rights of adolescent girls to the realization of their human potential in all spheres of life need to be put in the forefront of action at all levels of society. This requires an approach in which the needs and views of adolescent girls are elicited and taken into account in the planning, designing, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes designed for their benefit. Girls should be equipped with advocacy and leadership skills to prepare for active participation in all aspects of civic life. The approach should be multisectoral and holistic and based on needs and opportunities throughout the life cycle.

54. There is an urgent need to implement and internalize the existing international human rights standards including the CRC and the CEDAW with regard to adolescent girls. This calls for a translation of these Conventions into local languages and wide dissemination at all levels of society, including to adolescent girls, families, communities, governmental and non-governmental organizations. The key to achieving wide acceptance of these standards is the understanding that realizing the full enjoyment of human rights by adolescent girls will be of benefit not only to themselves, but to the whole of society.

55. In order to achieve these goals Governments should review, repeal and harmonize laws, including customary laws and policies to bring them into line with international agreements. Governments should implement the provisions in the related international instruments, including the CRC and the CEDAW, supported by the international commitments as attained in the Cairo Programme of Action and the Beijing Platform for Action.

56. The rights of adolescent girls should be seen as an integral part of human rights. In that regard the human rights treaty monitoring bodies in particular the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women should, when considering the reports submitted by States parties, give particular focus to the consideration of the full enjoyment by adolescent girls of their rights. Such consideration should be seen as a matter of priority.

57. Action is needed to improve the status of adolescent girls at all levels of society including the family, community, governmental and non-governmental institutions including professional and scientific associations. A participatory approach in which people from all sectors of society are actively involved to meet the common goal is essential. This will include the sectors of justice, education, health, employment, social welfare, economic planning, religious affairs, youth and culture. Regional and international institutions should collaborate closely and respond to the needs of all actors at national level.

58. Governments and donors should review allocation and management of resources across sectors in terms of alleviation of poverty, taking into account adverse consequences of poverty for the development of adolescent girls.

59. The situation of adolescent girls needs to be given greater visibility. This requires the disaggregation of existing information by sex, age and other relevant variables and the acquisition and dissemination of new information including: (a) qualitative and quantitative information about the status of adolescent girls; (b) the factors which affect the fulfilment of their rights in society; and (c) what will work best to achieve positive changes for more effective policies and programmes. Governments and international organizations should facilitate information sharing and networking among young people, Governments, international organizations and NGOs in support of adolescent rights.

60. For purposes of policy formulation and programme development, a comprehensive strategy of prevention, protection, participation, recovery and rehabilitation should be developed to serve as the basis for specific programmes and actions for adolescent girls.

61. Effective mobilization of the whole community and child-focused community structures at national and local levels should be given the highest priority to assume responsibility for situation analysis, advocacy, monitoring, protection, recovery, rehabilitation and the participation of adolescent girls. Community-based action should also be given high priority as a means of promoting and strengthening collaboration between Governments and NGOs as well as all other sectors of society toward sustainable action.

62. In this respect, women's groups, youth servicing organizations and religious groups should be assisted to develop their commitment and capability to assume leadership and responsibility.

63. Government agencies and civil society should make every effort to generate and develop a collective understanding of gender issues and their impact on social values, community attitudes and the behaviour of adolescent girls at the national and community levels.

## **B. Area-specific conclusions and recommendations**

### **1. Adolescent girls in need of special protection**

64. The Expert Group Meeting noted the existence of predisposing factors which contribute to the growing numbers of girls in especially difficult circumstances. These include: war, civil strife, and ethnic conflict; vulnerability of adolescent girls to violence and abuse because of lack of protection mechanisms and the failure of legal systems to hold perpetrators accountable for these crimes; changing value systems in transitional economies; overseas migration of parents for work; the general increase in dysfunctional family structures, and substance abuse.

#### **a. Overall approaches and strategies**

65. The experts considered existing approaches for the implementation of paragraphs 278, 280, 281, 283 and 284 of the Platform for Action. It was recommended that Governments, civil society, NGOs and international agencies formulate programmes and policies for adolescent girls in need of special protection, emphasizing:

- Prevention: Readily available parenthood education programmes; special programmes for families at highest risk which include poverty alleviation interventions, financial and social support for credit, and skills training; and provision of basic services of health, nutrition and education;
- Protection: Community-based actions which monitor violations of human rights of adolescent girls within families and social institutions;
- Participation of adolescent girls “in their best interests” in the planning and management of community based programmes;
- Recovery and rehabilitation, in line with the both Conventions to address the mental, physical and psycho-social needs of the affected adolescent girls.

66. In the implementation of programmes for prevention, protection, participation and recovery and rehabilitation of adolescent girls in need of special protection by Governments, NGOs, and civil society, the following overall strategies are recommended to:

### Community-based actions

- Organize community-based prevention, monitoring and protection of children, with particular focus on adolescent girls in situations of abuse and exploitation, at the provincial, municipal, city, village, urban ward/slum levels by setting up local committees for the protection of children. Such committees will be responsible for monitoring, from a gender perspective of the CRC and the CEDAW, with special focus on the protection of adolescent girls;
- Mobilize local groups and train them to actively advocate, monitor, and protect and refer cases of abuse, and exploitation of girls, employment of girls, and other violations;
- Organize girl-child focussed networks or multi-sectoral coalitions of NGOs and Government in each country where none exists, city-wide, province-wide and in grassroots communities;
- Train volunteer advocates/facilitators, counsellors and other personnel in the above networks to assume responsibility for the advocacy, prevention, protection, monitoring and recovery of adolescent girls, who are at risk and in need of special protection;
- Emphasize the child-to-child approach in which the girl-child herself can be trained to effectively communicate, educate and empower other girls for protecting themselves and working toward the achievement of their life goals;
- Ensure that the process for preventing exploitation as well as for recovering and healing will be empowering adolescent girls. Education and life-skills training must focus on self-reliance, protection, decision-making and making the best choices for their own future.

### Guidelines for law enforcement agencies

- Governments should ensure that there are specific guidelines on the rescue, apprehension and detention of girls in prostitution, those living on the street, disabled girls and those unaccompanied by adults. Measures should be outlined for immediate referral to social welfare reception centres, and to avoid detention in police stations where girls are, in many cases, victimized and sexually abused by police officers themselves.

### Training and information materials

- In each country, NGOs and Government should develop and consolidate teaching/learning modules and materials which can be easily adapted to local groups

and situations. Such materials should address all aspects of education and empowerment of girls, and be available to family and community members, outreach workers of service delivery systems, judiciary, police and others.

**b. Actions for addressing adolescent girls affected by armed conflict, including refugee girls**

67. The experts recommended that Governments, international relief agencies, NGOs and civil society condemn the perpetrators of violations of the rights of girls and women. They should not be bystanders nor collude with violence. The international aid community has a tendency of not putting blame for excessive violence where it belongs, i.e. those who perpetrate the crimes and those who support them. The perpetrators must be identified and held accountable for their crimes.

68. The following actions are recommended to UNHCR, other international agencies, Governments and NGOs:

- Mobilize and organize community groups among the refugee and internally displaced populations for monitoring violations and setting up crisis intervention centres for information, counselling, liaison and paralegal support to adolescent girls;
- Work with the refugee population/internally displaced population to identify special needs of adolescent girls and devise means to address them;
- Organize gender sensitization of peace-keepers, camp leaders and others;
- Review regulations for family tracing as the International Committee of the Red Cross's present procedure gives priority to children under 15 years old and thus leaves out adolescent girls, thereby increasing their vulnerability;
- Implement the recommendations of Graça Machel's study on "Impact of armed conflict on children"<sup>2</sup>, with special emphasis on adolescent girls;
- Establish as soon as possible education facilities in the camps.

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<sup>2</sup>Ms. Graça Machel, the expert appointed by the Secretary-General, undertook this study with support from the United Nations Centre for Human Rights and the UNICEF, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 48/157 of 20 December 1993, and submitted a report to the General Assembly in 1996 (A/51/306).

**c. Actions for adolescent girls with disabilities**

69. The Expert Group Meeting observed that not enough attention was being given to the needs of adolescent girls with disabilities such as their rights to survival, development and participation. They should no longer be hidden or forgotten in institutions.

70. Governments, professional associations and NGOs should:

- Ensure that adolescent girls are eligible and have access to services and entitlements of national policies for disabled persons;
- Motivate support groups working for the disabled to give attention to this age-group, and to take special measures to address the sexuality of disabled girls, and to ensure their protection from abuse and sexual exploitation by their care-givers, family members and others in society;
- Ensure the early and correct diagnosis of disabilities;
- Give priority to education and skills training as recommended in Beijing Platform for Action;
- Motivate private sector to train and employ adolescent disabled girls;
- Ensure protection of adolescent disabled girls from discriminatory forced sterilization as where practised;
- Promote community-based rehabilitation (CBR) and integration of disabled adolescent girls into the mainstream activities and organize child-to-child programmes, particularly mentoring;
- Ensure the availability and provision of prostheses, other devices and support equipment to adolescent girls with disabilities and to develop accessibility guidelines for building and transportation systems;
- Ensure availability and accessibility to community services, especially education facilities.

**d. Actions for adolescent working girls**

71. Programmes for working girls, including domestic helpers, street hawkers, street children, factory workers, entertainment industry, bonded girls for agricultural and domestic work should be formulated on the basis of the International Labour Organization (ILO) Standards, Article 32 of the CRC and existing national laws on child labour. In the case of migrant working girls, they

should be able to enjoy their rights to nationality, services and privileges of the host country, in line with existing international conventions. In order to achieve these goals:

- Governments should prohibit adolescent girls from working in hazardous and exploitative conditions in line with the above international standards and impose sanctions on employers/agencies who serve as recruitment centres for bonded labour, slavery and sale of adolescent girls;
- Governments, NGOs and other actors of civil society, including employers, should take measures not only to ensure fulfilment of the girls' rights to education, health, food, shelter, play and recreation but also to protect her sexuality and vulnerability to abuse in the work setting;
- Women's organizations and community-based groups should monitor violations of rights and ILO standards and exploitation of adolescent girls by employers, families and community institutions and bring it to the attention of relevant authorities;
- Governments, NGOs and international agencies should ensure that adolescent working girls are protected by the proposed ILO Convention of 1999 on the "Elimination of the most intolerable forms of child labour";
- Governments should include interventions for the adolescent working girls in their national plans of action in line with the ILO-International Programme for the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) programmes, in particular, focussing on children working in hazardous and exploitative conditions.

**e. Actions for adolescent girls in circumstances of sexual exploitation, abuse and trafficking**

72. The meeting noted that adolescent girls are in some cases sexually exploited in the home through incest, in prostitution by pimps and abductors of girls, and in some circumstances by law enforcement officers and teachers as well as others in responsible positions.

73. The experts recommended the following actions, which are particularly relevant to adolescent girls:

**To Governments**

- Formulate gender sensitive policies as an integral component of the justice system with emphasis on the prosecution of the perpetrators as well as on the recovery of adolescent girls as victims;
- Monitor and, if necessary, impose immediate sanctions on groups and agencies in the sex industry who operate in hotels, bars and discotheques, in particular, those

- who employ under-age and adolescent girls (without certified birth certificates) for sexual and other purposes;
- Establish crisis intervention centres and recovery centres in collaboration with NGOs, religious groups and other community groups to provide immediate responses to the psycho-social needs of adolescent girls who have been abused;
- Monitor the trafficking of girls across borders through national and international networking with Governments, NGOs, women's organizations and other relevant entities;
- Review and/or enact legal intercountry adoption laws and policies with the view to preventing trafficking of girls under the guise of adoption;
- Establish a monitoring and reporting system for early identification, rescue, recovery, and rehabilitation of girl victims of sexual abuse within families and in prostitution;
- Completely ban child pornography and prosecute persons engaged in production, sale and distribution of child pornographic materials. In addition, take measures to protect children, from adult pornography;
- Ensure the implementation of the Declaration of the Stockholm Congress on the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children.

To NGOs, community groups and other actors of civil society

- Provide training on paralegal procedures and advocacy methods for women's organizations and youth groups, and on capacity-development of these groups for monitoring of abuse of girls and protection of the victims;
- Form coalitions with women lawyers' associations and legal groups across borders;
- Initiate and conduct orientation for adolescent girls in order to sensitize them to their vulnerability to sexual abuse and child pornography.

**f. Actions for adolescent girls affected by HIV/AIDS  
and without care-givers**

74. The Expert Group Meeting noted that adolescent girls affected by HIV/AIDS are the most vulnerable to further abandonment, neglect, exploitation and negative community attitudes. The non-availability and inadequate access of adolescents to information on sexuality and reproductive

health education from an early age is one of the reasons for incidence of HIV/STDs among younger and adolescent populations. Therefore the Meeting recommended that:

- Governments, international agencies and NGOs should give priority to ensuring the survival and well-being of such adolescent girls, who may be care-givers themselves, provide them with social services, counselling, and mobilize public support for their care;
- Governments and NGOs should advocate and take measures towards securing the rights to property, land and inheritance of this group of adolescent girls.

**g. Actions for appropriate juvenile justice systems for adolescent girls in conflict with law**

75. The Experts Group Meeting observed that adolescent girls are often the victims of the violations of law and not the offenders. Therefore, the Meeting recommended that:

- Governments should set up juvenile justice systems, in line with the CRC, with concern for “the best interests of the child”. Laws should be formulated for protection and immediate rescue of affected adolescent girls. Measures for apprehension and conviction of the perpetrators of the violations should be developed with the help of lawyers groups, including women's and professional associations;
- Governments should strengthen institutional arrangements for monitoring infringement of rights, ensure effective law enforcement against sex trafficking, child abuse and exploitation in line with existing international conventions and bilateral agreements in regard to cross-border trafficking and migration. Such cooperation is especially encouraged between State parties who have ratified the CRC and the CEDAW. Such agreements should specifically include cooperation in the detection, prosecution and trial of offenders who engage in illegal practices. Governments should permit courts to assume extra-territorial jurisdiction and should address the issues of corruption of law enforcement authorities;
- Governments should support the optional protocol to the CEDAW which will provide a complaint procedure at the international level, and the optional protocols to the CRC on (i) the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, as well as basic measures needed for their eradication, and (ii) involvement of children in armed conflicts. Governments should also develop rapid response system to address large scale violations of the rights of adolescent girls (e.g. rape, violence, bonded labour, custodial rape).

## **2. Health of adolescent girls including reproductive and sexual health and nutrition**

76. The International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action and the Beijing Platform for Action generally called for reproductive health information, counselling and services for youth and an end to discrimination against the girl-child. Since then some progress has been made in recognizing adolescents' health needs. However, this progress has not yet had sufficient impact on the health, including reproductive and sexual health and nutrition of adolescent girls, and so much more needs to be done in this respect.

77. The Expert Group Meeting discussed various health needs of adolescent girls in the areas of information and education, skills for life, counselling, quality and accessible health services, and a safe, supportive environment. Attention was given to the inter-relatedness of adolescent girls' issues and relevant interventions, the importance of addressing their concerns holistically, the need for coordinated interventions at the international, national and community levels. It was also emphasized that adolescent girls' health needs should be incorporated and institutionalized into the programmes of relevant governmental institutions, NGOs, professional bodies, and private service providers.

78. The Expert Group Meeting recommends action in the following seven areas, as critical considerations wherein the Beijing Platform of Action could be further successfully implemented. They include: strengthening the knowledge base of adolescent girls' health issue; providing a safe and supportive environment; fostering supportive policy and legislation; providing information, education and skills to adolescent girls; providing counselling and services; monitoring and evaluating policies and programmes with respect to the needs of adolescent girls; and increasing resources to better meet their needs.

### **a. Strengthening the knowledge base**

79. To be effective, policies and programmes must be solidly grounded in reality, and more extensive and better quality information for this purpose is urgently needed. The knowledge base needs to be expanded with regard to: the current status of the needs and problems of adolescent girls; the causal factors which contribute to these problems; and the most effective ways of addressing them, promoting health and providing care for those in need. A better understanding of these subjects will serve technically supported advocacy for policy, resource allocation and programming, increase the effectiveness of action, and, by providing stronger indicators and baseline measures, will help monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of action.

80. Governments should collect data that are disaggregated by sex and by age at the national level, taking advantage of different sources of data, including demographic and health surveys, STD/AIDS and other surveillance systems and clinical records.

81. Governments, NGOs and research and statistical institutions should:

- Establish and maintain an information database on the status of adolescent girls' health and development, using both qualitative and quantitative methodologies and taking full advantage of modern technology;
- Collect data on social and human rights related factors which make adolescent girls vulnerable to sexual violence and exploitation, early marriage and childbearing, unwanted and too-early pregnancy, unsafe abortion, STDs, HIV/AIDS, as well as conduct studies on the costs to individuals, family and society of these problems;
- Develop policies and programmes based on up-to-date reality by eliciting the views and experiences of young people and adults including parents through periodic surveys and analysis from a gender perspective;
- Summarize, publish and widely disseminate research findings in a user-friendly ways.

**b. Providing a safe and supportive environment**

82. The behaviours of young people are not only crucial to their present health but also have a powerful impact on their future health and longevity as well as those of their future families. Many of their health problems create not only immediate obstacles but also long-term problems at great cost to public health. But because adolescent girls are relatively powerless, much of what they do is determined by the environment in which they live. A lack of safety not only inhibits activities crucial to their development, but often results in permanent physical and psychological damage. If adolescent girls are not given the basic support they need, their development will be slowed and their basic human rights violated.

83. Government institutions, NGOs, communities and families should:

- Provide supportive and safe environment in the homes, schools, work places and communities by developing guidelines, legal instruments, and supportive social service programmes;
- Protect adolescents from harm, including sex-based violence, and help those who have been harmed to fully recover;
- Provide adolescent girls with opportunities to participate in sports and other recreational activities so as to enhance their physical and psychological well-being and self-esteem.

84. Governments and civil society should support families to assess and clarify the impact of their values on the health and well-being of the adolescent girls' health including sexual and reproductive health in light of changing conditions in society.

85. Governments and NGOs should work with the community to eliminate cultural and traditional practices that are harmful to adolescent girls' health, including discrimination of food allocation, early marriage and FGM.

### **c. Policy and legislation supportive of health needs**

86. It is essential that comprehensive policies for adolescent girls be created and implemented in each country, reinforcing international standards and agreements. Such policies should be elaborated and supported from within each society. While policies and legislation alone may not be sufficient enough to protect the rights of adolescent girls, they can provide a powerful basis for action across all sectors in society and at all levels, and help to overcome obstacles particularly in the sensitive areas of adolescent reproductive and sexual health. At present many laws are inconsistent with international standards, contradictory across sectors, gender insensitive and discriminatory of adolescent girls.

87. In order to reduce resistance to addressing adolescent sexual and reproductive health needs, a number of advocacy actions are needed.

88. Professional associations and others in civil society should make the case to Governments that investment in adolescent girls will have social and economic benefits to the whole society.

89. Governments and NGOs should provide training for those individuals who provide services to young people in all sectors, in order to strengthen their skills of interaction. They should sensitize those who strongly influence the health and well-being of adolescents including policy makers and community leaders to help them understand and be committed to the rights of adolescent girls to health and full human development.

90. Concerned organizations should establish coalitions of organizations, agencies and key individuals, and provide them with advocacy skills by developing strategies and articulating modalities for working with the media, policy-makers, youth, and the general public to advocate for common understanding for adolescent girls' health, including reproductive and sexual health, positive policies, effective programmes and increased resources.

91. Governments, professional training institutions including medical and nursing schools and teachers and social workers training institutions should incorporate adolescent girls' health considerations into their relevant work programmes. They should develop organizational policies and programmes for adolescent health, reproductive health and nutrition.

92. International organizations should assist political leaders and popular figures to serve as advocates for policies and programmes that favour gender equality with special attention to health-related rights of adolescent girls including rights to reproductive and sexual health, and nutrition.

**d. The provision of information, education and skills to adolescent girls**

93. Basic needs and human rights of adolescent girls include the acquisition of knowledge, information and skills to help them fully develop their human potential and make use of existing resources and opportunities in society. Unfortunately, adolescent girls are frequently denied this right which enable them to develop competence in all walks of life and the self-esteem which arises from it. In areas such as sexual and reproductive health some barriers often prevent the provision of information in sound and relevant ways because of the unfounded fear that knowledge creates irresponsibility when in fact past experiences suggest the reverse is true.

94. Government institutions, NGOs and international organizations should:

- Support provision of comprehensive and accurate information and education about adolescent girls' health to girls through multiple sources, including homes, schools, out-reach programmes, youth centres, religious institutions, health services, media and social marketing programmes;
- Assist in- and out-of-school programmes that provide training to adolescent girls of skills for life in such areas as interpersonal communication, decision-making, critical thinking, resistance to negative peer pressure, leadership and advocacy.

Government agencies and NGOs should:

- Ensure that information provision to adolescent girls is linked to resources and services such as counselling, health services and recreational and vocational training programmes;
- Revise curricula for in- and out-of-school youth to reflect current knowledge about adolescent girls' health to ensure that it reinforces gender equality, human rights, and information which will serve to promote the reproductive and sexual health of adolescent girls, good nutrition, and the prevention of health problems.

95. Governments should encourage the incorporation of adolescent girls' health issues into pre- and in-service training for teachers and those in related sectors. Training should be gender-sensitive, and designed to strengthen both skills and knowledge, and utilize interactive methodologies.

e. **The provision of health services and counselling**

96. An absolutely essential need is high quality, accessible and youth-friendly services that meet the health needs of young people, especially in the areas of reproductive and sexual health, where they are often least well served. Often policies, legislation and practices do not permit adolescent girls' access to these services, and have restrictions of consent of others.

97. Governments, NGOs, private service providers and professional organizations should:

- Expand services, including counselling, to adolescents by building on existing services which should ensure privacy and confidentiality, low costs, and accessible hours and sites that will optimize their use by adolescents. Services should also be available in low-cost non-clinical settings, such as youth centres, schools or peer educator/outreach programmes, workplaces, and the "street";
- Provide adequate quality care for adolescent girls with special needs, for example, pregnant girls and young mothers, those suffering from complications of unsafe abortion, and victims of violence;
- Plan for long-term reorientation and expansion of reproductive health services through the traditional family planning and health services, STD/HIV programmes, and private health services, and link them to other resources for adolescent girls, such as legal assistance, rape crisis centres, and educational institutions.
- Provide pre- and in-service training to health providers in relation to adolescent girls' health needs, including recognition of evidence of violence against girls, complications associated with FGM, pregnancy, childbirth, the management of complications arising from unsafe abortion, HIV/AIDS, the prevention of pregnancy and STD related problems including family planning and counselling where relevant;
- Develop service provision guidelines and protocols for adolescents in conjunction with concerned parties.

f. **Monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes**

98. Learning about the effectiveness of what have been done is essential not only to improve practices, but also to help use resources in the most cost-effective way. Because young people are best equipped to know what they feel, what they think, and what they do, it is essential that they play a role in the monitoring and evaluation of action that is designed for their benefit. Monitoring and evaluation is needed to fully understand the process of what is being provided, the immediate outcome, and to the extent possible, the impact of action on the health and well-being of adolescent girls, even though impact is particularly difficult to measure.

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Please find enclosed, a copy of the report of the Expert Group Meeting on "Adolescent Girls and their Rights" which took place from 13 - 17 October 1997, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

With best regards.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "D. Gierycz".

Dorota Gierycz  
Officer-in-Charge, Gender Analysis Section

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99. Governments should develop appropriate qualitative and quantitative indicators for adolescent health, and encourage their use when programming activities for adolescents.

100. Governments, NGOs and international agencies should assist those who implement programmes to better monitor and evaluate the programmes in an effort to improve their effectiveness, and to document and disseminate lessons learned.

101. In addition to the need to monitor and evaluate policies and programmes by those who implement them, monitoring at the international level is also needed of the degree to which international standards and agreements are being met. In line with this, a Roundtable of Human Rights Treaty Bodies on "Human Rights Approaches to Women's Health, with a focus on Reproductive and Sexual Health and Rights"<sup>3</sup>, was jointly organized by DAW/UNFPA/UNHCHR in Glen Cove, Long Island, New York, December 1996, with a view to bringing the issue of women's reproductive and sexual health rights into the mainstream of the human rights agenda.

102. The Expert Group Meeting recommends that members of the United Nations' human rights treaty monitoring bodies focus their attention on adolescent girls' rights, including their rights to reproductive and sexual health.

103. The relevant entities of the United Nations system should:

- Provide technical assistance to treaty monitoring bodies in understanding and developing standards, processes and procedures for monitoring adolescent girls' issues, in particular, reproductive and sexual health;
- Coordinate efforts to help build the capacity of countries, including providing technical assistance to monitor human rights of adolescents girls, in particular their rights to reproductive and sexual health;
- Establish an inter-agency committee to monitor the progress of adolescent girls' health and rights, including their rights to reproductive and sexual health.

104. NGOs should help identify the human rights dimensions of adolescent girls' health issues, with a focus on reproductive and sexual health, and bring these to the attention of the human rights treaty monitoring bodies, including cases of violations of internationally agreed standards.

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<sup>3</sup>Briefing Note and Final Recommendations of this meeting are available from Gender, Population and Development Branch of UNFPA (New York) which is also preparing a full report.

**g. Increasing resources for the health of adolescent girls**

105. Investing in the health of the adolescents will pay enormous dividends for the whole society, not only by reducing problems, but by enabling their full potential to be developed for the benefit of all. But because little attention has been paid to adolescent health needs, insufficient resources have been allocated. Adolescent girls' programmes require adequate human and financial resources. There has been a welcoming indication among a number of international agencies that they see the health of adolescents, and especially the reproductive and sexual health needs of girls, as an important priority. The increasing formulation and implementation of national adolescent health policies also attest to this fact. A cooperative, coordinated approach among governmental, non-governmental and international agencies will help greatly toward the optimal management of existing resources and encourage donors to provide further resources.

106. Governments should promote and provide resources for health provisions, education, skills development and entrepreneurship training for adolescent girls, including those who are single mothers.

107. International organizations should review economic policies, fiscal agreements and cooperative assistance regarding the impacts on health, including reproductive health, nutrition and development of adolescent girls, and initiate action to alleviate such impacts.

108. While a number of international organizations have increased their support for adolescent girls' health, particularly in the areas of reproductive and sexual health, much more still needs to be done. Accordingly, the Expert Group Meeting calls upon the donor community to increase their support for adolescent girls' health, including their reproductive and sexual health needs.

**3. Creating an enabling environment for the realization of human rights and empowerment of adolescent girls**

109. The Expert Group Meeting agreed that the term "adolescent girls" will be applied to girls at the upper age limit of 18 years recognized by the CRC and a lower age limit approximate to the age of menarche, or alternatively to consider adolescence as the second decade of life.

110. It further decided that the central issues of education; family, culture and social-economic environment; law and legal reform; and the role of the media were critical for creating an enabling environment for realizing the human rights of adolescent girls and the empowerment of adolescent girls to realize their rights.

**a. Education**

111. Education is an important means of empowering adolescent girls to realize their rights. Apart from the acquisition of knowledge and values conducive to social progress, education

encourages mental development providing such benefits as the training in logical and analytical thinking, and the capacity for responsible decision-making. Education also improves organizational, administrative and management skills. It creates an enhanced self-esteem, and provides an environment for improved status within the community and full respect for human rights.

- (i) Recognizing the importance of equality and gender sensitive education at all levels for adolescent girls, and drawing from experiences at national and international levels, the Meeting recommended that Governments, with the assistance of NGOs and other actors in civil society should:
- Provide access to affordable quality education at primary, secondary and tertiary levels and equal career development opportunities for adolescent girls;
  - Remove the formal barriers and obstacles at all levels for admission of adolescent girls into professional and educational institutions on an equal basis with adolescent boys;
  - Work towards eliminating social, cultural, traditional and other barriers that prevent adolescent girls from having equal access as boys to education, training, and career development.
- (ii) In order to ensure equality and gender sensitive education to all adolescent girls including those in particularly difficult circumstances, Governments, jointly with NGOs and other actors in civil society, should:
- Provide and develop infrastructure facilities to ensure safe access to education and educational opportunities for out-of-school adolescent girls while ensuring an opportunity for them to re-enter regular school system;
  - Provide remedial teaching specifically to deal with illiteracy among adolescent girls;
  - Ensure the continued education of pregnant adolescent girls and young mothers as it is their inalienable right;
  - Provide counseling services for adolescent girls both in- and out-of-school.
- (iii) In order to create in adolescent girls a sense of their own potential to develop and contribute as responsible citizens to society, Governments, educational institutions and professional associations, jointly with NGOs, should:
- Introduce educational reform to revise curricula and teaching methodologies to reflect a gender-sensitive perspective and scrutinize teaching aides for this purpose;

- Provide resource persons who promote positive gender perspectives and enhance the self-esteem and sense of identity of adolescent girls;
  - Include in curricula information on women's contributions throughout the history, their roles in history, development and culture;
  - Involve adolescent girls and boys in a participatory process to make changes in curricula and teaching methodologies by providing, for instance, opportunities for them to express their views on teaching programmes and ensuring that these view points are considered when formulating curricula and teaching methodologies.
- (iv) In order to prepare adolescent girls to meet the challenges of the future, Governments, legislative assemblies and civil society should work towards elaborating gender sensitive and comprehensive educational policies which:
- Enhance the status of female teachers in the school system to provide positive role models for adolescent girls and reinforce standards of gender equality;
  - Institutionalize training and education programmes for health care workers, legal, medical and other professionals, law enforcement officials and the judiciary to sensitize them to the special needs and concerns of adolescent girls;
  - Develop programmes to disseminate information and to educate all sections of society on the meaning and application of international standards of equality and human rights, including the CRC and the CEDAW, with special programmes for both adolescent girls and boys.

#### **b. Social environment**

112. Family is the basic unit of society. All of its members should be educated to respect the rights of adolescent girls according to the positive cultural and spiritual principles inherent within a society. Children, both boys and girls, need to be trained to respect themselves, each other and adults in society.

- (i) In order to assist families and communities in fulfilling these roles, Governments should, in line with their international commitments:
- Provide a support system such as: parental leave; child care facilities; alternative technology; and income generating activities for mothers/guardians which will allow them to take care of the household responsibilities without burdening the adolescent girls, thus allowing them to pursue their education, leisure and social interaction;

- Develop special social policies to address the needs of adolescents in low-income families.
- (ii) Governments and civil society should link together to provide training programmes for parents, extended family members and care-givers on areas such as:
- Social conditioning of boys and girls to reflect the values of gender equality;
  - Development of a sense of the value of girls as human beings and the importance of recognizing their human rights;
  - Sharing of best practices from other countries and communities to illustrate that investments in the human development of adolescent girls are of critical importance to the well-being and progress of the family, community and the nation;
  - Reproductive health/sex education as it affects adolescents, and development of strategies for communicating this information to the adolescents.
- (iii) Governments and civil society organizations should support media-based information, education and communication programmes to reach adolescent girls, their families and communities such as UNICEF's "Meena" and "Sara" initiatives<sup>4</sup>. Such programmes should emphasize the rights of girls and serve as entry points for the development of leadership skills and self-esteem.
- (iv) The Meeting identified some issues that have recently been recognized as critically important for the well-being of adolescent girls and therefore should be addressed in Governmental policies as well as programmes and activities undertaken by civil society. These include:
- The vulnerability of girls to violence, sexual abuse and harassment within the environment of family, school, workplace and community. The high incidence of acts of violence by boys against girls through abduction, rape, physical abuse and sexual harassment should be addressed by socializing boys to refrain from violence and to exercise responsibility in sexual relations;

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<sup>4</sup> The Meena Communication Initiative in South Asia and the Sara Communication Initiative in the Eastern and Southern African Region are founded on the need to establish a positive and dynamic role model for young girls and to provide a communication package in local languages which assists in the development of their psycho-social skills: problem-solving and decision-making, critical and creative thinking, communication and other interpersonal skills, self-awareness and empathy, as well as coping with stress and emotions. Both initiatives deal with issues such as girls' equal rights to education, health and nutrition, lessening of workload in the home and elsewhere, avoiding early marriage and freedom from exploitation. "Sara" also tackles the issues of sexual abuse and exploitation, teenage pregnancy and traditional practices, such as FGM. Both initiatives use animated film, comic book and radio format. Television also plays a significant role in broadcasting the stories of "Meena".

- Harmful traditional practices, (e.g. forced and early marriage, FGM, nutritional taboos and body disfigurement) that cause permanent impairment to the physical, mental and psychological well-being of adolescent girls;
- Re-examining cultural traditions and practices so as to discover positive traditions that reinforce the international human rights standards regarding girls. These positive traditions can also be conducive to internalizing these international standards in the family and community.

113. Pressure for affirmative action and all the positive measures that entail should be maintained by women's groups on the basis that gender equality cannot be realized without addressing critical concerns of girls in general and of adolescent girls, in particular, who are at a vital stage of their lives.

#### c. Law and legal reform

114. The Meeting reiterated that law and legal regulations are an important strategy in realizing the human rights of adolescent girls. However, they must not be considered the only strategy and must be reinforced by supportive social and economic policies and allocation of resources for implementation, monitoring and enforcement.

115. The Meeting also recognized that the human rights of adolescent girls and creating an enabling environment are delicately balanced between promoting self-esteem, a sense of identity, reproductive rights, the access to health, education and development, protection from violence and freedom to make decisions on matters that concern them.

- (I) Recognizing critical importance of the CRC and the CEDAW in achieving the equality and enjoyment of human rights by adolescent girls, the Meeting agreed that State parties which have not ratified the Conventions should do so. The Meeting also agreed that the State parties to these Conventions should:
- Withdraw reservations that are in conflict with standards set by the CRC and the CEDAW;
  - Reform and update their national laws in conformity with the standards that they have accepted by ratifying the CRC and the CEDAW;
  - Allocate resources and take measures to provide the support system required for the effective implementation and enforcement of these laws;
  - Be consistent with their international commitments and take steps to prohibit by law cultural and traditional practices that deny adolescent girls their rights to survival, development and protection from violence;

- Give publicity to international laws and introduce them in adult education and school programmes;
- Disseminate information on and enforce new laws;
- In countries where international treaties take precedence over domestic laws, publicize these treaties in compilations of their laws;
- In countries where state laws are consistent with international standards but are in conflict with customary laws, uphold the state laws relating to adolescent girls;
- Adopt the following laws concerning adolescent girls:
  - Nationality laws which ensure that every girl and boy can acquire citizenship either through her/his mother or father in accordance with article 9 of the CEDAW and article 2 of the CRC;
  - Laws to raise the minimum age required for marriage to 18 years;
  - Laws that recognize the adolescent girls' right to make decisions with regard to sexual and reproductive health;
  - Laws stating that sexual relations with girls under the age of 16 years will constitute statutory rape;
  - Laws providing for the exercise of judicial discretion regarding sentencing when the sexual act is consensual and the male involved is under the age of 18 years;
  - Laws requiring compulsory registration of births, deaths and marriages in order to enforce laws that set a minimum age for work, marriage and consensual sexual relations of adolescent girls;
  - Special laws to safeguard the rights of adolescent girls in special risks categories such as disabled, migrant, displaced, refugee girls and girls in the situation of armed conflicts.
- (ii) NGOs and other actors of civil society should become aware of international monitoring mechanisms in order to monitor Governments' performance and accountability in implementing the CRC and the CEDAW.
- (iii) The Meeting agreed that gender equality cannot be realized without addressing critical concerns of adolescent girls at a vital stage of their lives and without creating gender-

sensitive environment conducive to realization of their rights. Therefore, policy makers and non-governmental actors should:

- Institute and enforce, whenever necessary, affirmative action and other positive measures;
- Institute awareness-raising and gender sensitivity training for lawyers, judges, police and other law enforcement officials;
- Develop institutional mechanisms that will enable the consideration of views expressed by adolescent girls and women when formulating laws and national development policies and projects;
- Use such institutional mechanisms to provide for a gender impact assessment of policies and projects.

#### **d. Role of media and communication strategies**

116. The Expert Group Meeting agreed that the media and information technology such as the Internet and television in particular play a prominent role in shaping ideas about what constitute socially acceptable behaviour. Given the power of modern mass media to influence social values, the Meeting expressed great concerns about the violence, aggression, materialism, sexual exploitation and stereotyped portrayal of women reflected in the media and their negative impacts on promoting gender bias in a society.

117. At the same time, the potential of the media to act in a positive manner to help change the prevailing negative images of women and promote the advancement of adolescent girls has largely been untapped and unutilized. Therefore, Governments, private sector, civil society including media organizations should consider:

- Broadcasting regulations and guidelines which include not only what may not be presented but also affirmative provisions of what can be included;
- Prohibition of programmes that promote violence (especially family violence) and child pornography and which could be detrimental to the mental and physical health of girls;
- The use of traditional media such as theatre and folk poetry for communicating positive gender-sensitive messages which will help enhance self-esteem of adolescent girls and raise awareness of their rights as expressed in the CRC and the CEDAW.

**ANNEXES**

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## II. LIST OF DOCUMENTS

### Papers from the organizers

- EGM/AGR/1997/BP.1      Enabling Environment for the Empowerment of Adolescent Girls  
Background paper prepared by the Division for the Advancement  
of Women/Department of Economic and Social Affairs
- EGM/AGR/1997/BP.2      Adolescent Girls and their Rights: Girls in Need of Special  
Protection  
Background paper prepared by Ms. Njoki Wainana for the United  
Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

### Papers from the experts

- EGM/AGR/1997/EP.1      Sexual and Reproductive Health of Young Girls  
Prepared by Dr. Anameli Monroy
- EGM/AGR/1997/EP.2      Selected Aspects of Reproductive Health of Adolescents  
Prepared by Ms. Jane Kwawu
- EGM/AGR/1997/EP.3      The Health of Adolescent Girls: Their Needs and their Rights  
Prepared by Dr. Herbert L. Friedman
- EGM/AGR/1997/EP.4      Reproductive Rights of the Adolescent Girls and Empowerment  
through Information and Education  
Prepared by Ms. Pamela McNeil
- EGM/AGR/1997/EP.5      Adolescent Girls and their Rights  
Prepared by Dr. Anitha Ronstrom
- EGM/AGR/1997/EP.6      Adolescent Girls and their Rights: Focusing on Street Girls in  
Prostitution in the Philippines  
Prepared by Ms. Teresita Silva
- EGM/AGR/1997/EP.7      Realizing the Human Rights of Adolescent Girls  
Prepared by Prof. Savitri Goonesekere

- EGM/AGR/1997/EP.8 Ukrainian Girls - The Problems of Self-Identification Behaviour
- EGM/AGR/1997/EP.9 Communication sur le theme "Environnement Propice a L'emancipation des Adolescentes"  
Prepared by Ms. Ahoua Ouedraogo
- EGM/AGR/1997/EP.10 Adolescent Girls and their Rights: Health of Adolescent Girls, with Special Emphasis on Reproductive and Sexual Health and Nutrition  
Prepared by Dr. Asha Mohamud

Papers from observers

- EGM/AGR/1997/OP.1 The Girl Child with Disabilities: Implementing the Platform for Action  
Prepared by Disabled People's International
- EGM/AGR/1997/OP.2 Statement of the Holy See

Reference papers

- EGM/AGR/1997/INF.1 Traditional and Cultural Practices Harmful to the Girl-Child  
African Centre for Women/Economic Commission for Africa, Occasional Paper No.1, 1997
- EGM/AGR/1997/INF.2 Generation 97 - What young people say about sexual and reproductive health - United Nations Population Fund & International Planned Parenthood Federation, 1997
- EGM/AGR/1997/INF.3 Violence Against Women (WHO Fact Sheets), July 1997  
-The Girl Child  
-Rape and Sexual Assault  
-Health Consequences
- EGM/AGR/1997/INF.4 Contraceptive Update: A handbook for health workers  
International Planned Parenthood Federation Africa Region (IPPFAR), 1996
- EGM/AGR/1997/INF.5 Vision 2000: Strategic Plan  
International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), 1993

- EGM/AGR/1997/INF.6      IPPF Charter on Sexual and Reproductive Rights  
International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), 1996
- EGM/AGR/1997/INF.7      Legal and Policy Barriers Affecting Sexual & Reproductive Health  
Services in: Burkina Faso, Senegal, Swaziland, Zambia  
International Planned Parenthood Federation Africa Region  
(IPPFAR), 1996
- EGM/AGR/1997/INF.8      The Human Right to Family Planning and Sexual and  
Reproductive Health  
International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), 1996
- EGM/AGR/1997/INF.9      IPPF Annual Report 1996 - 1997
- EGM/AGR/1997/INF.10      Challenges - Empowering Youth  
International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), 1995

### III. AGENDA OF THE MEETING

#### *Expert Group Meeting on Adolescent Girls and their Rights*

13-17 October 1997  
 Economic Commission for Africa  
 United Nations Conference Centre (Conference No.4)  
 Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

#### AGENDA AND ORGANIZATION OF WORK

##### Monday, 13 October

- |                         |   |
|-------------------------|---|
| 9.30 a.m. - 10.30 a.m.  | Registration  |
| 10.30 a.m. - 11.00 a.m. | Coffee Break  |
| 11.00 a.m. - 1.00 p.m.  | Opening Ceremony<br>- Introductory Statements<br>Welcome by Ms. Josephine Ouedraogo (ACW/ECA)<br>Speakers: Ms. Angela E.V. King (DAW)<br>Mr. K.Y. Amoako (ECA)<br>Mr. Marcel Diouf (OAU)<br>- Election of Officers<br>- Adoption of Agenda  |
| 1.00 p.m. - 3.00 p.m.   | Lunch   |
| 3.00 p.m. - 4.30 p.m.   | Plenary Session<br>- Panel discussion on: "Adolescent girls in need of special protection".<br>Presentation of papers by UNICEF / ECA and experts.<br>1. Ms. Sree Gururaja (UNICEF)<br>2. Ms. Beverly Jones (ACW/ECA)<br>3. Ms. Anitha Rönström<br>4. Ms. Tamara Govorun<br>5. Ms. Teresita L. Silva  |
| 4.30 p.m. - 4.45 p.m.   | Coffee Break  |
| 4.30 p.m. - 6.00 p.m.   | Plenary Session (continued)<br>- Panel discussion on: "Health of adolescent girls, including reproductive and sexual health and nutrition".<br>Presentation of papers by UNFPA / ECA and experts.<br>1. Mr. James Chui (UNFPA)<br>2. Ms. Beverly Jones (ACW/ECA)<br>3. Dr. Asha Mohamud<br>4. Dr. Herbert L. Friedman<br>5. Ms. Jane A. Kwawu |

6.30 p.m. - 8.00 p.m. Reception at the Delegates Bar

**Tuesday, 14 October**

9.00 a.m. - 11.00 a.m. Plenary Session (continued).  
- Panel discussion on: "Creating an enabling environment for the realization of human rights and empowerment of adolescent girls".

Presentation of papers by DAW / ECA and experts.

1. Ms. Dorota Gierycz (DAW)
2. Ms. Souad Abdennebi (ACW/ECA)
3. Prof. Savitri W.E. Goonesekere
4. Ms. Ahoua Ouedraogo
5. Ms. Pamela McNeil

11.00 a.m. - 11.30a.m. Coffee Break

11.30 a.m. - 1.00 p.m. Plenary Session (continued).  
- Discussion on the three themes, including interventions by observers.  
- Facilitation of Working Groups.

1.00 p.m. - 2.30 p.m. Lunch

2.30 p.m. - 5.00 p.m. Working Group discussions.  
- Working Group 1 - Adolescent Girls in Need of Special Protection.  
- Working Group II - Health of Adolescent Girls, including Reproductive and Sexual Health and Nutrition.  
- Working Group III - Creating an Enabling Environment for the Realization of Human Rights and Empowerment of Adolescent Girls.

**Wednesday, 15 October**

9.00 a.m. - 5.00 p.m. Working Group discussions (continued)

**Thursday, 16 October**

9.00 a.m. - 11.00 a.m. Plenary Session (continued)  
- Conclusions of Working Groups discussions

11.00 a.m. - 11.30 a.m. Coffee Break

11.30 a.m. - 5.00 p.m. Drafting of Report

**Friday, 17 October**

|                        |   |
|------------------------|---|
| 10.00 a.m. - 1.00 p.m. | Completion of Draft Report  |
| 1.00 p.m. - 3.00 p.m.  | Lunch   |
| 3.00 p.m. - 4.00 p.m.  | Adoption of Reports from Working Groups<br>Adoption of the Meeting's Report |
| 4.00 p.m. - 5.00 p.m.  | Closing Session   |

## ANNEX IV

### Composition of working groups

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