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Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development

Written statement* submitted by Graduate Women International (GWI), a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[02 June 2019]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.

Graduate Women International (GWI) - Educating Women and Girls is Key to Building a Corruption - Free World

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Corruption is the abuse of power, by individuals, businesses and government institutions for illegitimate gain. Corruption is prevalent in all countries. Its impacts are felt by people in all walks of life but corruption's most pernicious effects are on women and girls. Corruption and its perverse manifestations are age-old; documented evidence and research have accounted for its existence as a constant in human societies worldwide for thousands of years. Yet, in only the past 25 years, has this phenomenon began to be critically explored in its many forms and the extent of its consequences examined and recognized. While the United Nations (UN) was an early harbinger of warning of its extensive effects on the social, economic and political conditions around the world, it is only now that global and national leaders have begun to call for the elimination of these abuses and for the indictment of perpetrators.

In many countries, grand and petty corruption have impeded development, escalated conflicts, damaged the environment, exacerbated gender, economic and social inequities, violated human rights and threatened state security with anarchy. The true cost of corruption is inestimable.

Graduate Women International (GWI), whose membership is comprised of graduate women from around the world, is committed to achieving global access to education for women and girls up to the highest level. It stands united with its National Federations and Associations, in sixty countries, against all facets of corruption.

Building on GWI's official written statement to the 35th session of the Human Rights Council on Corruption as a Barrier to Girls' Education¹ and as an organization upholding the principles of the UN Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC)², GWI renews its appeal to the Human Rights Council and all its Member States to fully embrace the vital importance of educating women and girls and recognizing that corruption has a lethal and irreversible effect on educating and empowering women and girls in all countries. GWI further holds that decisive actions and sound political will are required to eliminate all forms of corruption for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG4 (providing quality education)³, SDG5 (achieving gender equality)⁴ and SDG16 (building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions)⁵.

As graduate women, we recognize that corruption must be eradicated and unrestrictedly exposed in order to unleash the transformative power of education so that women and girls can participate fully in all spheres of public and private life. GWI consequently calls on the Council to act now to expedite a virtuous circle that enables and empowers all women and girls to claim their rights and our organization holds country governments accountable for ending the scourge of corruption.

1 GWI, Written Statement to the 35th session of the HRC: https://graduatewomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/2635_A_HRC_35_NGO_GWI-Written-Statement-Uploaded-to-UN.pdf

2 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), United Nations Conventions Against Corruption (UNCAC) https://www.unodc.org/documents/brussels/UN_Convention_Against_Corruption.pdf

3 SDG Knowledge Platform, SDG4 : <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg4>

4 SDG Knowledge Platform, SDG5 : <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg5>

5 SDG Knowledge Platform, SDG16 : <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg16>

Specifically, governments must ensure that funds earmarked for education are secured and appropriated forcefully without misappropriate favor. Education typically comprises 20 to 30 percent of a country's budget and is therefore most prone to illegal misappropriation, that diverts funds away from schools and universities. Resources stolen from education budgets lead to the loss of quality education, overcrowded classrooms, lack of sanitation facilities for girls, or worse, no schools at all⁶. Acts of bribery such as schools and universities charging unauthorized or excessive fees are rampant in many countries and, force students, predominantly girls, to drop out⁷. The time is now to act against such crimes.

Just in the United States of America, every year, \$1 trillion USD are paid in bribes and an estimated \$2.6 trillion USD are stolen annually through corruption⁸.

Corruption can be obvious but is mostly carried out in ways easier to disguise such as bribery, extortion, cronyism, nepotism, parochialism, patronage, influence peddling, graft and embezzlement. Corruption facilitates criminal enterprises such as drug trafficking, money laundering and human trafficking, though it is not restricted to these activities.

Corruption in all its forms affects women and girls in unique and disproportionated ways because power, money, and privilege are a traditional part of the male domain and an explicit dimension of corruption. This is especially true for women who experience compounded marginalization as indigenous women, elderly women and widows, ill or disabled women, women of color, single parent women, women who are migrants, refugees, and internally displaced. There are forms of corruption, that affect women and girls more specifically, such as sexual and gender-based violence (GBV) that are among the most widespread, monstrous and least prosecuted of all gender-based corruption. GWI voices outrage that these incidents often escape reporting because of the shame women and girls associate with sex-based violence or gender power dynamics.

In today's complex and volatile world, GWI and its affiliates call on the Council, its Member States and civil society to understand that corruption is everywhere and disproportionately affects women.

Without effective and comprehensive accountability at all government levels the right to education becomes a hollow promise. GWI calls on governments to act decisively towards the elimination of all forms of corruption.

Furthermore, in that endeavor, GWI posits that whilst women are disproportionately affected by corruption and its consequences, women and girls are precisely the most powerful agents for its elimination but that empowering women to tackle corruption critically depends on educating them. The time is now to fully recognize and invest in the education of all women and girls to enhance their potential as builders of a corruption-free world.

Recommendations:

Corruption exasperates the uneven power dynamic between men and women, denying them access to education, safety from gender-based violence, sexual harassment and exploitation and economic independence, condemning them to lives of disparity and disenfranchisement.

The message is clear: corruption is an intolerable and deeply pervasive barrier to women's education and empowering women to tackle corruption in all its forms depends on educating them.

⁶ TRANSPARENCY International, Corruption, Education <https://www.transparency.org/topic/detail/education#>

⁷ TRANSPARENCY International, Corruption, Education <https://www.transparency.org/topic/detail/education#>

⁸ United Nations, Anti-Corruption Day <https://www.un.org/en/events/anticorruptionday/>

We cannot afford not to invest in education: investment in education, especially girls' education is an investment in a prosperous, peaceful and sustainable future.

GWJ and its worldwide affiliates recommend the following actions to the 41st session of the Human Rights Council and its Member States to collectively:

- Mainstream gender and human rights perspective in all anti-corruption programming at the international, regional and national level.
- Provide gender-sensitive reporting and complaints mechanisms that allow women and men to report incidences of corruption and to demand accountability without fear of retaliation.
- Enhance the role of women in anti-corruption programming by creating local alliances with women's non-governmental organizations (NGOs) whose members can serve in direct contact with victims.
- Create safe spaces to allow young women worldwide to engage in discussions about socially necessary ethical behavior with the goal to teach future generations to live, function and succeed in corrupt-free environments.
- Render compulsory the publication of national, district, school and university budgets to allow for detailed monitoring of education resources.
- Impose strict regulations, penalties and monitoring processes in schools and universities to ensure that corruption does not taint the appointment of teachers and professors and the grading of students so that all students, particularly women and girls, are treated fairly.
