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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.

[26 January 2025]

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

Graduate Women International Beijing Platform for Action-Based Recommendations to the Human Rights Council 58th Session

Graduate Women International (GWI), a nongovernmental organization with special consultative status to the Economic and Social Council since 1947, submits this statement to the 58th session of the Human Rights Council in recognition of the approaching 30th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA), adopted unanimously by 189 Member States [1] at the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995. On this occasion, GWI urges Member States to reaffirm their commitment to its vision, ensuring that gender equality and the rights of women and girls, especially in education, become a reality before the next 30 years.

Recognizing the volume of statements presented to the HRC, GWI affiliates in 48 countries, along with independent members worldwide, present 11 recommendations at the onset of this statement with supporting information provided subsequently. We urge Member States to consider the recommendations to modernize their commitment to the BPfA, which remains crucial for advancing the rights of women and girls:

Improving Access to Education

1. Expand girls' access to secondary education by integrating policies that extend basic education beyond secondary level to facilitate continued learning and development.
2. Increase access to secondary, tertiary, and non-traditional education by increasing enrollment, monitoring retention, offering financial support, and improving school infrastructure, including AI training and community-based initiatives tailored to local needs.
3. Allocate adequate resources to education systems and increase budgetary commitments to education, particularly in underserved and rural areas, ensuring quality facilities and gender-inclusive infrastructures.

Eliminating Stereotypes and Bias in Education

4. Dismantle discriminatory cultural norms and beliefs on traditional gender roles, through awareness campaigns, community engagement and law enforcement to address such as confining girls and women to domestic responsibilities or subjecting them to early and forced marriages and unplanned pregnancies.
5. Reform educational curricula and teaching materials to eliminate gender stereotypes by developing textbooks that challenge traditional gender norms and roles, including gender-sensitive themes that promote equity, integrating gender studies and awareness in teaching tools.
6. Develop and fund gender awareness training for educators to promote gender-sensitive teaching, equip them with strategies and tools to address unconscious biases, and ensure inclusive, supportive classrooms.
7. Invest in career education programs to encourage girls to explore diverse, ambitious, and non-traditional career paths, with a focus on technical, scientific, and leadership fields.
8. Increase funding of women entrepreneurs to grow businesses and economy, and training for leadership.

Improving Accountability and Progress

9. Monitor and evaluate the implementation of education reforms, by tracking progress, identifying gaps, and developing technical assistance programs to address challenges, ensure accountability, and inform data-driven decisionmaking.

10. Enhance gender-disaggregated data collection and monitoring systems to track women and girls' progress within SDGs' goals.

11. Promote platforms for sharing the best practices and lessons learned from different countries and regions.

Supporting Statements

The BPfA and its 12 Critical Areas of Concern identify barriers to gender equality and propose strategic actions to address them. This historic, comprehensive framework remains vital for advancing women's rights globally, yet it is underutilized in the face of persistent inequalities and intersecting global crises, such as climate change, conflict, economic disparity and education rights.

Over the past three decades, the BPfA has influenced United Nations (UN) resolutions, including UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace, and security, reinforcing its centrality in advancing gender equality globally, [2] the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women General Recommendation No. 35 [3] which emphasizes the BPfA's focus on eliminating violence against women, and many more, yet this historic framework offers so much more towards achieving women and girls' equality.

The BPfA has shaped international and national policies, evidenced by 131 countries enacting 472 legal reforms in support of gender equality between 2010 and 2020. It has also significantly influenced the 2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), intersected with the 2024 Pact of the Future [4], and fueled global movements for the equality and empowerment of women and girls. While it remains a critical benchmark for progress in gender equality, intensified efforts, particularly in the education sector, remain.

The BPfA established that education is a human right and an essential tool for addressing the 12 Critical Areas of Concern stemming from the BPfA. [5] They are: (1) women and poverty; (2) education and training of women; (3) women and health; (4) violence against women; (5) women and armed conflict; (6) women and the economy; (7) women in power and decision-making; (8) mechanisms for the advancement of women; (9) human rights of women; (10) women and the media; (11) women and the environment; and (12) the girl child. [6]

Through quality education and training (Critical Area 2), women gain access to better economic opportunities, helping them escape poverty (Critical Area 1) and, in turn, improving health outcomes (Critical Area 3). Education enables women to contribute meaningfully to the economy (Critical Area 6) and take on leadership roles in decision-making at all levels (Critical Area 7).

Furthermore, education contributes to raising awareness and driving action on critical issues such as gender-based violence (Critical Area 4), human rights (Critical Area 9), media representation (Critical Area 10), and environmental sustainability (Critical Area 11).

In conflict zones, girls are often deprived of education, and this lack exacerbates their vulnerability to exploitation and violence (Critical Area 5). Additionally, education is key to overcoming the challenges faced by the girl child and transforming their life trajectories (Critical Area 12). Institutional mechanisms (Critical Area 8) must actively prioritize gender-equitable education policies and programs. Focusing on the interconnectedness of education drives broader societal change.

Since 2015, there has been progress in education, with a global increase of 22.5 million girls enrolled in primary school. However, only 14.6 million additional girls have advanced to

lower secondary education, and 13 million to upper secondary education. [7] These gaps highlight the urgent need for targeted interventions to ensure continuity in girls' education.

As mentioned in recommendations 1 and 2, GWI advocates for greater access to secondary, tertiary, continuing, and non-traditional education for women and girls worldwide. The basic literacy and numeracy skills developed in primary school are insufficient to equip girls with the knowledge and competence necessary to realize their full potential. Post-primary education serves as a powerful gateway for women to compete effectively in the labor market, increase earning potential, gain greater control over resources, ultimately enabling them to become future leaders and decisionmakers.

Discrimination in girls' access to education remains a major challenge, with 122 million girls out of school globally, including 34 million at the primary level and 87 million at the secondary level. [8] Several factors prevent girls from attending school, completing education, and contribute to high dropout rates and poor academic performance, thereby hindering their advancement and perpetuating cycles of inequality.

As outlined in recommendation 4, cultural norms and practices such as early marriages and pregnancies, along with the expectation that women remain in domestic roles, limit girls' educational opportunities and impede their aspirations. Education can challenge these deeply rooted norms by dismantling harmful cultural beliefs, promoting critical thinking, and equipping women with the knowledge and skills needed to question and break free from restrictive societal expectations.

Gender-based discrimination in education both reflects and reinforces systemic societal inequalities. Education systems often perpetuate gender stereotypes through biased curricula, teaching materials, and AI tools, limiting opportunities for girls and women. Addressing these issues requires not only, equitable access to education but also the creation of gender-sensitive learning environments that challenge traditional roles and empower women as equal partners. As emphasized in recommendations 5 and 6, promoting non-gender-stereotyped educational resources is essential for addressing the root causes of gender discrimination and breaking down biases

Recognizing education as a critical tool for empowering women and girls and improving their lives while contributing to broader social development, as highlighted in recommendation 7, GWI urges governments and stakeholders to prioritize investment in formal and non-formal education systems, from early childhood education to higher education and women entrepreneurs in recommendation 8. In fact, a 2018 World Bank study estimates that the "limited educational opportunities for girls, and barriers to completing 12 years of education, cost countries between US\$15 trillion and US\$30 trillion in lost lifetime productivity and earnings." [9]

GWI urges the HRC and Member States to take decisive action to accelerate commitments to the BPfA. Such measures are essential to upholding the BPfA's legacy and advancing the broader goals of human rights and sustainable development. GWI and its affiliates stand ready to assist with progress.

[1] European Parliament Briefing PE 646.163, February 2020

[2] UN Security Council Resolution 1325, 31 October 2000

[3] CEDAW General Recommendation 35, 26 July 2017

[4] Summit of the Future, Outcome Documents, September 2024

[5] 1995 United Nations Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action

[6] UN Women 12 Critical Areas of Concern Deconstructed.

[7] 2024/5 UNESCO GEM Report

[8] UNICEF, Girls' education: Gender equality in education benefits every child.

[9] World Bank: Empowering Girls through Education, 11 October 2024