Response from Working Group on Girls
to the Synthesis Report of the Secretary General

The Road to Dignity by 2030:
Ending Poverty, Transforming All Lives and Protecting the Planet

The Working Group on Girls welcomes the synthesis report of the Secretary General entitled: 'The Road to Dignity by 2030: Ending Poverty, Transforming All Lives and Protecting the Planet.' An initial reading of the report shows five specific references to girls: Paragraphs 51, 60, 69 (twice), and 119. Table 1 of paragraph 60 lists the Sustainable Development Goals. Girls are included in the title of Goal Five 'Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls;' however, this specific mention of girls together with women is not sufficient in the realization of girls' human rights. We are concerned that the report substantively lacks strong language on girls' human rights. If the new sustainable development goals do not give adequate attention to girls' experiences, their lives will not be transformed by 2030.

Commitment to an overarching and fully inclusive human rights framework for sustainable development, with explicit, non-negotiable elements for realizing the human rights and potential of the girl child is imperative for actual realization. Despite the agreements of the Beijing Platform for Action twenty years ago and the detailed framework provided by CEDAW and the CRC, implementation of girls' rights has fallen critically short of the progress that was expected. In some places, the erosion of their rights has continued.

It is well documented that girls carry an inordinate share of the burden of poverty, gender violence and discrimination, curtailed educational opportunities, unpaid work, family care, lack of economic opportunities and services, and dangerous health risks due to harmful practices and attitudes, early pregnancy and related complications, and lack of access to appropriate services. Without gender equality and human rights at the forefront of the sustainable development agenda, it is inevitable that girls will continue to be left behind.

Paragraph 51

Girls are mentioned last in paragraph 51, after boys, in a paragraph stating the desire to 'leave no one behind' ensuring equality, non-discrimination, equity and inclusion at all levels. Paying special attention to people, groups and countries most in need is admirable. Noting that this is the century for women is appreciated, but the realization of gender equality will continue to be hampered **if girls and girls' rights are not prioritized – particularly the girl-child living in poverty, the adolescent girl, the rural girl, the girl who lives in the slum, the girl who is differently abled, the indigenous girl, the girl who is a migrant, a refugee or displaced and the girl in vulnerable groups and minorities.**

Girls tend to be 'silenced' and invisible in matters of climate change, conflict situations, humanitarian emergencies and terrorist related situations. These situations pose an

additional threat to girls of sexual violence and trafficking in the midst of a struggle for survival. An example of this is found in a recent report from Syria. 'In the refugee camps and crowded Turkish towns on the border with Syria, impoverished Syrian women and girls are falling prey to criminal rings that are forcing them into sexually exploitative situations ranging from illicit marriages to outright prostitution.'[1]

Paragraphs 68 and 69

We know the reality of 'pervasive poverty' and 'gross inequalities' (para 10) and how this impacts women and girls; yet, the report lacks strong references to the **feminization of poverty**. Paragraph 68 notes progress in addressing gender inequality and realizing women's rights and at the same time acknowledges that these remain key challenges in all regions of the world. It is disappointing however to also note in the same paragraph that girls are not named in the statement: 'The agenda must accommodate the voices of women, youth and minorities' because unless girls are specifically named, they continue to remain invisible.

Girls are mentioned twice in paragraph 69. 'We must ensure zero tolerance of violence against or exploitation of women and girls', and in the subsequent statement: 'women and girls must have equal access to financial services, and the right to own land and other assets.' Zero tolerance of gender based violence and non-discriminatory access to financial services, land, and other assets are indeed critical for sustainable development. However, the reality is that as long as gender inequality, discrimination and violence continue with impunity, there will be little change for the girl-child. Zero tolerance of violence is not enough for transformation – enforcement of the law, of human rights, and ending impunity, coupled with adequate financing of programs – including national floors of social protection – is transformational.

In paragraph 69 it states that children and adolescents have the right to education and must have a safe environment in which to learn, but is this a reality in the life of the girl child? Section L of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action is a model with regard to prioritizing the rights and needs of the girl-child. It states 'the girl child is discriminated against from the earliest stages of life, through her childhood and into adulthood.'[2] In order for education to have an impact on the lives of girls, the issues of 'son preference – which includes female infanticide, and prenatal sex selection – female genital mutilation, child, early and forced marriage, sexual exploitation, sexual abuse, discrimination against girls in food allowance and other practices related to health and well-being' must be addressed.[3]

Six Essential Elements:

Reviewing the six essential elements outlined in the report – starting with 'dignity' and 'people' is laudable but not transformational. Highlighting gender equality, **putting girls rights first** is essential for transformation. Full implementation of

[1] http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2014/1026/In-Turkey-Syrian-women-and-girls-increasingly-vulnerable-to-exploitation

[2] Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action para 259.

[3] Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action para 259.

gender equality is the bedrock of a transformational agenda. In the area of health alone The World Health Organization statistics for adolescent pregnant girls are abysmal.

- 16 million girls aged 15 to 19 and 1 million girls under 15 give birth every year—most in low- and middle-income countries.
- Complications during pregnancy and childbirth are the second cause of death for 15-19 year-old girls globally.
- Babies born to adolescent mothers face a substantially higher risk of dying than those born to women aged 20 to 24.[4]

Girls are the silent and invisible 'people' needing to be reached.

Paragraph 78

The Working Group on Girls advocates for the prioritization and identification of girls' human rights in the new development agenda, and welcomes the statement in paragraph 78 that 'the practice of child, early and forced marriage must be ended everywhere.' However we want to see girls included in the listing of groups in the same paragraph. Malala has shown us how powerfully girls can speak out. While women, youth, and adolescents are specifically mentioned, we strongly call for the inclusion of girls' voices as well.

Data Revolution

Caryl M. Stern, president of the U.S. Fund for UNICEF notes that **2014 was one of the worst years for children.** 'Up to 15 million children are caught up in violent conflicts in the Central African Republic, Iraq, South Sudan, the State of Palestine, Syria and Ukraine – including those internally displaced or living as refugees. Globally, an estimated 230 million children currently live in countries and areas affected by armed conflicts.' [5] This report, while powerful, lacks disaggregated data on the number of girls affected versus the number of boys. The strong call for a data revolution in the synthesis report is very welcome and one of the principles outlined in paragraph 65 underlying a transformational approach. It calls for analysis based 'in credible data and evidence, enhancing data capacity, availability, disaggregation, literacy and sharing.' There is a further principle agreeing that no goal or target be considered met unless met for all social and economic groups. This is not sufficient; **it must include all ages, both sexes,** and social and economic groups.

Paragraph 119

Paragraph 119 contains the fifth mention of girls, agreeing that we have a long way to go towards equality of participation of women and girls in science, technology, including ICT's engineering and mathematics in the 21st century. We ask however, how can girls be encouraged to take up study in these fields when their human rights are not sufficiently realized?

References to an integrated agenda are excellent but the ordering reflects a preconceived priority with economics named first, followed by environmental and

[4] http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs364/en/

[5] http://www.eurochild.org/news/news-details/article/unicef-calls-2014-one-of-worst-years-for-children/

social solutions. If 'people' are an essential element surely 'social solutions' would be the first sought, coupled with the environment. Mentioning economic solutions first seems to indicate 'a business as usual approach' which is not transformative. Paragraph 83 states that the agenda 'mirrors' the broader international human rights framework. However, we ask: why not state that the agenda ***demands the full implementation*** of international human rights frameworks? People – girls, women, boys and men - want freedom from gender-based violence, peace and security, economic development, education, and a healthy environment.

Paragraph 134

Paragraph 134, focusing on measures for social goods, equity and the distribution of costs and benefits, and impacts on future generations, is excellent. However, we must go beyond measuring the gross domestic product. The development and implementation of metrics for measuring social progress, human well-being, justice, security, equality and sustainability together with multi-dimensional approaches to poverty, and measures of subjective well-being all point in the right direction. Disaggregated data is essential for ***all*** groups. The girl child will be included if this is our framework. If the girl child is valued then all children and youth will be valued and services made available. People-centered, planet-sensitive development with a paradigm of accountability is the way forward.

Girls must be equally heard

'Young people will be the torchbearers for the next sustainable development agenda through 2030.' (Paragraph 3) If this is so, then the voices of girls must be equally heard. As Malala Yousafzai so eloquently argues, it is important to know that "a girl has the power to go forward in her life; that she is not only a mother, sister or wife, but should have her own identity and equal rights as a boy." A truly transformative agenda will require concerted commitment to human rights, gender equality and empowerment in all spheres of life, as well as transparent accountability to ensure girls' voices are heard and their rights secured.

Conclusion

To conclude we quote from Eleanor Roosevelt: "Where, after all, do universal human rights begin? In small places, close to home - so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world. Yet they are the world of the individual person; the neighborhood [s] he lives in; the school or college [s]he attends; the factory, farm, or office where [s]he works. Such are the places where every man, woman, and child seeks equal justice, equal opportunity, equal dignity without discrimination. Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere. Without concerted citizen action to uphold them close to home, we shall look in vain for progress in the larger world."

Girls of the world will not wait for their human rights to be bestowed. They have begun to live these human rights despite threats, oppression and lack of freedom. The Working Group on Girls, together with girls around the world, call on the 69th General Assembly to pave the way by making girls' human rights central within the Post 2015 Sustainable Development Agenda to ensure girls' rights "have meaning" everywhere.