



29<sup>th</sup> session of the United Nations Human Rights Council

## HIGH-LEVEL PANEL ON REALIZING THE EQUAL ENJOYMENT OF THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION BY EVERY GIRL

Joint oral statement by Plan International, Arigatou International, Defence for Children International (DCI) and Save the Children

Thank you Mr President.

This statement is delivered on behalf of Plan International, Arigatou International, Defence for Children International (DCI) and Save the Children

Mr President,

We would like to draw the Council's attention to a major obstacle to the fulfilment of the right to education for girls: that is, the issue of school-related gender-based violence.

Each year, some 246 million school children are subject to harassment or attacks, either on their way to school or within the school itself.<sup>1</sup> Nearly half of all sexual assaults are committed against girls younger than 16 years of age.<sup>2</sup> Millions more children live in fear of bullying, and too many are being abused under the guise of discipline.

Mr President, these figures are simply unacceptable. Change is needed now.

Schools should be safe environments that promote human rights, equality and inclusion. Instead, too often they become places where violence is normalised, legitimised, and even promoted.

School-related gender-based violence occurs in every country of the world. It limits enrolment, undermines participation and performance, and increases dropout rates. It has serious consequences on sexual and reproductive health, and destructive psychological effects, particularly amongst girls. In many countries, unintended pregnancies resulting from sexual violence and rape in and around school mark the end of girls' education.

Mr President, we would like to recommend States to:

- First, strengthen efforts to prevent and ban all forms of violence, in and around schools, by adopting adequate legislation and policies, as well as measures in schools, families and communities to change norms and behaviours towards violence.
- Second, States should ensure that these measures are designed and implemented using a human rights based approach and with the involvement of all stakeholders. In particular, we know from experience that we cannot end school related gender-based violence without the meaningful participation of children and young people.
- Finally, we encourage the Council to place school-related gender-based violence as a priority on its agenda, and strengthen its commitment to ensuring that education is not a source of fear for girls, but rather a place where their rights are realised.

Thank you Mr President.

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<sup>1</sup> Plan International (2013), *A girl's right to learn without fear: Working to end gender-based violence at school*, p. 11.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 5.