United Nations Commission on the Status of Women - 65th Session
General Debate
New York, 15-26 March 2021

STATEMENT

Excellencies, colleagues, I make this statement today on behalf of: Plan International, CARE International, ChildFund Alliance, Child Rights Connect, Defence For Children International, ECPAT, FEMNET, International Planned Parenthood Federation, Save The Children, SOS Children's Villages and Terre Des Hommes.

Participation in public life comprises all areas of life and all parts of society. To be full and effective, it must enable all individuals to be active and for their experiences to be meaningful. We are extremely concerned that in 2021 girls' rights to participation might not be reflected in this year's CSW theme.

Girls and young women in all their diversity are disproportionately excluded from policy decisions and remain underrepresented in political structures and governing bodies. They are held back by age and gender inequalities, multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and systemic oppression that prevent them from being full participants and leaders in public life.

Despite all these challenges, girls and young women, feminist networks and organisations are bringing transformative change for gender equality through activism. Their contributions must be acknowledged and supported, and institutionalized spaces need to be created to include them in public decision making.

Key to meaningful participation is equal access to quality information. Greater investment is needed in developing girls' leadership and civic capacities, skills and confidence through gender-transformative education to equip girls to meaningfully participate.

Gender-based violence is another major impediment to girls' and women's participation in public life. Violence and harassment do not only prevent girls and young women from engaging in civic spaces and positions of power, but also act as a barrier to the fulfilment of other human rights.

Child marriage, adolescent pregnancy, and unpaid domestic labour and care work cause barriers for girls. Furthermore, girls must be able to access safe violence prevention and response mechanisms, including reporting mechanisms and sexual and reproductive health rights services.

We call upon Governments to:

- Implement all provisions of the CRC and CEDAW and withdraw any reservations without delay;
- Invest resources to support girls' and women's full and meaningful participation in decision-making;
- Build the foundations for active participation in public life in childhood and adolescence, including through CSE;
- Strengthen and resource participation of children and young people in civil society; and
- Prevent and respond to all forms of gender-based violence and discrimination against women and girls, including in digital spaces.