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and the empowerment of women
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**Draft Discussion Paper
Submitted by the
The NGO Committee on UNICEF: Working Group on Girls***

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** The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations.*

We, the Non-Governmental Organizations in consultative status with ECOSOC and members of the Working Group on Girls, reaffirm and call attention to the inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of the girl child. We acknowledge the important step taken in Section L of the Beijing Platform for Action (1995) in emphasizing the Girl Child as well as in Agreed Conclusions adopted by the fifty-first session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), with the theme “The Elimination of Discrimination and Violence against the Girl Child”. However, we are concerned that after more than a decade of policies, promises and programs the girl child remains powerless, neglected and invisible throughout her life-cycle and is repeatedly denied her political, economic, social and cultural rights and subjected to cultural and legally sanctioned behaviors that hinder her development and empowerment.

The recently released Secretary-General’s Study on Violence against Children reveals the severe and pervasive nature of the violence endangering the lives of girls on all continents. The root causes of violence, including negative cultural attitudes and practices, poverty and inadequate access to education and health services, create barriers to growth for girls particularly in the form of discrimination, insecurity and disempowerment. These root causes highlight the need for a holistic, rights-based approach to ending discrimination and violence against girls.

The Expert Group Meeting offers a unique opportunity to strengthen the implementation of the Agreed Conclusions adopted by the 51st Session of the CSW. We are pleased to have this opportunity to offer some of our observations to the Expert Group for consideration and discussion.

In the agreed conclusions of the CSW, the Commission acknowledged that girls do not receive sufficient, explicit attention in pol

- § Prioritize girls' education in all development plans and poverty reduction strategies
- § Encourage developing nations to increase national funding for basic education and to target education for girls with a view to content and pedagogy which is gender and age appropriate
- § Insist that donor nations demonstrate their political and financial commitment to education for girls by canceling the onerous debt of impoverished countries and increasing donor aid for girls' education
- § Include a recommendation to "allocate sufficient resources" and to "monitor progress in closing the gap between girls and boys" provides some hope that these commitments will lead to action (14.2)

Aside from funding education adequately, there is a need to examine how girls are taught so that the funding given for girls' education is used in a manner that will lead to better participation of women and girls in the political, economic and social structures of their countries. Without their full participation sustainable development is impossible.

Visibility and Participation of the Girl child

The Commission on the Status of Women in its agreed conclusions of the 51st Session, acknowledged that girls do not receive sufficient explicit attention in policy and program development and resource allocation (#10) and called on governments to, "Give explicit attention to the girl child in budget processes at all levels, including resource allocation and expenditure reviews, to ensure the mobilization of sufficient resources for the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against girls" (131).

Recent studies have shown that girls' and women's participation in fields of math and science in particular are limited by their perceptions of recognition and success. Girls and women are underrepresented in fields relating to finance and economics, and there needs to be greater attention from governments in presenting these areas as areas of accomplishment for women.

Monitoring Progress and Accountability

Success in requiring attention to the human rights of the girl child depends on effective measuring of previously set goals and targets agreed upon in the above mentioned documents by the international community. It requires, above all, adequate attention by researchers and ample documentation in the form of disaggregated data to show age and sex distinctions.

The inclusion in CSW 51 of a commitment to mainstream attention to the girl child into “all legislations, policies and programmes and strengthen national monitoring and evaluation inter alia, by utilizing gender budgeting and gender impact assessment,” (14.15a) provides some hope that governments might move from rhetoric to action. However the Commission’s attention to the systematic collection of disaggregated data and to strengthening national research, monitoring, and evaluation of the progress in eliminating all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child can provide proof that the needs exist and results will not only contribute the “double dividend” but assure that girls’ human rights are respected (14.16a and 14.16b).

In conclusion, we thank the Expert Group Meeting for your kind attention to these matters and for extending your review and consideration to the girl child, as we all know, she is the key to the future.

Annex 1

Members of the Steering Committee of the Working Group on Girls NGO Committee on UNICEF, New York

Signatories of the WGG Discussion Paper in Preparation for the Expert Group Meeting. Oslo, Norway, 4-7 September, 2007

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