

## CSW59 Oral Statement

Written by Victoria, Julia, Hamna, and Mai on behalf of the Coalition for Adolescent Girls

This statement was written by four girls leading different lives in Egypt, Pakistan, and the United States. Even though we've never even been on the same continent together, we were able to come together as equals and choose what we believe is important to do on behalf of girls everywhere. Since the UN delegates all get to be in the same building, the same *room*, for this whole week, we'd like you to know that we have some high expectations.

Differences in culture, tradition, relative wealth - these are *excuses* for oppression. Girls are victimized every day just *for being girls*, and no society is guilt-free.

Here are some of the problems that girls still face:

First, even when the law guarantees them the right to go to school, *girls are still blocked from obtaining or finishing their education*. Sometimes the family says that they can only afford to send one child to school which is mostly the boy, making it seem that investing in girls is not worthwhile. We need to provide targeted support to girls and make sure they know their rights.

Second, girls are not safe and do not ever feel safe. Merely walking outside can lead to criticism, catcalls, stares, or threats of assault based on what they are wearing. We're told that the solution is to police ourselves, practice this harassment internally on ourselves every day, and if that doesn't keep us safe, we're told to depend on male guardians to protect us. If we're supposed to be dependent on men, why can't we depend on them not to be the perpetrators of violence? The truth is that girls do not have any real

advocates: they are beaten even in their own homes and even the police turn a blind eye, calling it a “personal family problem.”

Countless efforts have been made to solve these issues, from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states over and over again that “all men and women are equal”, to the more recent Millennium Development Goals. The main issue is that none of these covenants or treaties is legally binding, so the international community can get away with breaking their promises. When every country is guilty of betraying girls, do you really think that the cloudy eye of “international censure” is going to work? We need international interventions that institute government agencies and officials, who will, for example, ensure girls receive and finish their education. There needs to be an investigation into how authorities respond to women and girls who report abuse. Why it is that national sovereignty can only be interrupted by the international community when genocide or other “crimes against humanity” occur? Girls and women being treated as second class citizens is a crime against humanity. Women and girls not being hired or paid equally or allowed to rise in the ranks is a crime against humanity, and when countries don’t make progress on these issues, the international community needs to create sanctions and take action against them, even if it goes against their economic interest.

In order to set a framework for more accountable and active interventions, girls need to be included in the process of making indicators. We deserve to be represented in the decisions that concern us and our sometimes tragic personal experiences can help stop the perpetuation of loopholes and mistakes in the future.

We recognize that progress has been made, but when we have only three minutes to speak we cannot waste it patting you on the back. That’s part of the problem – that we are

left out of the loop and out of time. Give us more time to speak to you, to interact with you, to be represented in panels and conferences. If you think that what we have said is too strident or clichéd, it's because you have not given us enough time to speak fully to you. And if you think what we have said is unfeasible, you just haven't been listening to the right people. It's time to welcome girls to the table.