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17th Session

Agenda Item: **Ending Harmful Practices to Protect Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights**

United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
Protecting Women and Girls from Gender-Based Violence

The United Nations Women Executive Board,

Affirming the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) as a means to legally enforce gender equality among all Member States party to the Convention,

Bearing in mind the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, as it defines Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) as a violation of human rights, threatening the health of women and girls, including their psychological, physical, sexual, and reproductive health (SRH), and stresses the need to end FGM as a cultural and traditional practice,

Reaffirming that marriage with women under 18 years old is technically defined as a child marriage according to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages, and that child marriage remains prevalent in some countries due to the absence of judicial frameworks or cultural and religious justification,

Reminding the pooled funding model of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Global Programme, with the World Bank as a third partner to provide low-interest financing for the prevention of Child, Early, and Forced Marriage (CEFM),

Recognizing the UNFPA - UNICEF Joint Programme on the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation and its direct investment towards the acceleration of ending the harmful practice by 2030,

Noting that education is a primary driver for girls and women to refuse FGM, as UNICEF states that girls with secondary or higher education are 70% more likely to oppose the practice,

Recognizing that adolescent pregnancies that occur in 90% of CEFM victims remain a significant barrier to girls' education, health, economic development, and gender equality,

Recognizing that access to comprehensive SRH is essential for bodily autonomy, health, and the reduction of poor health outcomes,

Reaffirming the commitment to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 3 on Good Health and Well-Being and SDG 5 on Gender Equality, to support improved family planning,

Recalling General Comment No. 36 - Article 6: right to life for the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which condemns regulations on family planning methods that push women and girls to turn to harmful alternatives,

Acknowledging that each Member State addresses abortion within its own legal, cultural, and religious framework,

Deeply concerned that limited access to safe abortion services has led to unsafe abortion practices, which the World Health Organization (WHO) identifies as a major contributor to preventable maternal mortality worldwide,

Deeply concerned that establishing new laws for protecting dignity and bodily rights is needed for all Member States,

Conscious that existing dowry systems and unequal rights to inheritance can lead to harmful practices such as son preferences,

Reaffirming that the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (UNCAT) criminalizes unconsensual sexual activity such as rape,

Reaffirming that UN Women has identified the normalization of rape culture through the publication of *16 ways you can stand against rape culture*, which treats various cultural attitudes as systemic harmful practices that must be dismantled,

1. *Suggests* Member States adopt internationally recognized conventions, especially CEDAW, which enforces the criminalization of harmful practices that violate women and girls' sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR);
2. *Encourages* Member States to strengthen access to comprehensive, age-appropriate sexuality education, particularly in rural and underserved communities, to reduce adolescent pregnancy rates by:
 - a. Developing standardized guidelines for the training and certification of educators to ensure they are adequately qualified to deliver evidence-based, age-appropriate, and culturally sensitive comprehensive sexuality education;

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- b. Providing evidence-based education on contraception, reproductive health, consent, and healthy relationships;
 - c. Partnering with UNFPA, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and accredited NGOs to expand access to educational resources, awareness campaigns, and youth-friendly reproductive health services;
 - 3. *Recommends* all Member States and UNFPA to provide technical assistance to highly impacted Member States, particularly those in the region of the Global South, by:
 - a. Strengthening rural maternal clinics and training skilled attendants for improving access to SRH services with financial aid to reduce maternal mortality;
 - b. Increasing the availability of reproductive health products, like menstrual hygiene products, at public healthcare facilities;
 - 4. *Recommends* Member States to improve family planning support capabilities by:
 - a. Increasing awareness of access to affordable contraceptives and voluntary family planning services as a means of reducing unintended pregnancies and unsafe abortions under the purview of UNFPA;
 - b. Facilitating adequate distribution of contraceptives and related education accessible to all citizens on the risks and effects in rural and impoverished areas to prevent unmet need for family planning;
 - c. Offering non-discriminatory counseling and post-abortion care for all women experiencing complications, regardless of the circumstances surrounding the pregnancy;
 - d. Aligning their policies, laws, and legislation with the ICCPR in such a way that regulations placed on abortion and other forms of family planning do not encourage or pressure women and girls to turn to illegal and unsafe alternatives;
 - 5. *Encourages* Member States, especially those which suffer from harmful practices or social norms, to strengthen the collaboration among local communities and traditional leaders with the aim of protecting girls and women from CEFM by:
 - a. Educating local communities and traditional leaders on the importance of protecting women and girls from CEFM through programmes such as seminars and trainings, collaborating with UN Women;
 - b. Raising awareness of the risk of CEFM for citizens through holding campaigns in collaboration with UN Women;
 - c. Ensuring that every girl, regardless of religion, culture or other circumstance, has access to secondary education, especially in local communities where CEFM is prevalent;

- d. Encouraging local communities to work with UN Women and UNFPA's initiatives to prepare a progress report every 6 months as a way to confirm prevalence rates, and extending the deadline to 2 years when sufficient progress is made;
6. *Requests* UN Women to support Member States in raising educational rates to eliminate FGM in high-prevalence regions and communities, by:
- a. Promoting secondary education in regions where it is not mandatory for women to enhance their legal awareness of their rights to refuse FGM;
 - b. Constructing regional agencies that consist of leaders in traditional groups and local communities to share regional best practices and mitigate FGM;
 - c. Spreading awareness through campaigns led by local educational activities and schools;
 - d. Sharing best practices on preventing FGM between victims of nearby local communities in Member State regions;
 - e. Continuing support of UNFPA's initiatives to send volunteers to developing regions to help and report on FGM;
 - f. Making fundraising platforms where the investment of individual donors is directed towards counseling and support for victims;
7. *Suggests* that all Member States adopt a consent-based law that deems any sexual activity lacking explicit, mutual agreement, especially rape, as unlawful, so that Member States will be aligned with UNCAT;
8. *Invites* Member States to ensure women's rights to inheritance, Stridhan, and dowry refusal and to raise awareness in the community on harmful practices against women;
9. *Calls upon* UN Women to support Member States in establishing national legislation to set 18 as the minimum age of marriage, acknowledging the existence of diverse religious and cultural contexts, while affirming that such contexts do not constitute permanent justification for long-term progress by:
- a. Requesting UN Women to collaborate with UNODC to make guidelines aiming to set the laws for the punishment of sexual offenders;
 - b. Requesting UN Women to conduct a comprehensive legal review of Member States with no established minimum age of marriage or where existing legislation contains exceptions permitting marriage under the age of 15, and for those Member States who have a prevalence rate of child marriage above 30%;

- c. Calls upon UN Women to cooperate with the World Bank as a third partner to provide low-interest financial and legal assistance to identified Member States for legal reviews, prioritizing the use of funding in:
 - i. Legal reform assistance, including expert deployment and draft legislation, for countries that have exceptions permitting child marriage;
 - ii. Enforcement capacity building, including judicial and law enforcement training, marriage legislation system and the development, for Member States where child marriage prevalence exceeds 30% but adequate legislation exists.