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**World crime trends and emerging issues and
responses in the field of crime prevention and
criminal justice**

Statement submitted by Soroptimist International, a non-governmental organization in general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council**

The Secretary-General has received the following paper, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* [E/CN.15/2023/1](#).

** Issued without formal editing.



This statement is submitted by Soroptimist International on behalf of its members in 3,000 communities across 120 countries, and their unwavering commitment to improving the lives of women and girls in all their diversity.

It is well documented that disproportionate numbers of women and girls are among the demographics that face heightened levels of discrimination, harassment, violence, and abuse across all sectors of public life.

Violence is being increasingly and purposefully installed at the heart of education systems to invoke terror in children – particularly girls – who are currently facing exclusion from education on unprecedented levels. This dire situation is now visibly a global phenomenon whereby physical, psychological, sexual violence and even femicide is infecting school systems worldwide.

An emerging trend which is of utmost concern is the demonstrable expansion of the lengths that actors will go to ensure the exclusion of women and girls from education. In recent months, thousands of girls have been subjected to the most extreme acts of violence and discrimination perpetrated against them.

Included in these recent acts of violence which have been documented during the misogynistic expulsion of young girls from learning are poisonings in school buildings and shootings that target specific body parts to impede girls' ability to read and learn. These methods of violence cause severe physical injury that can be lifelong, including respiratory illnesses and blindness. However, the 'hidden' health impacts, including mental health implications can be just as severe. Cases of children dying have been documented in recent months, even where state actors have done their utmost to restrict the circulation of these appalling attacks from the wider world. In such cases, terror is being inflicted to make children fearful of attending school and cautious of returning. Specifically, girls are the targets of these brutally violent attacks, as some state and non-state actors attempt to forcibly remove all girls from all aspects of public life, including their human right to education. The international community must rise to serve justice to these victims of brutal misogyny.

A rise in mass shootings in other parts of the world has also given rise to a similar culture of terror in education, which is also leading to dangerous and lifelong health implications – both physical and mental. While mass school shootings are not necessarily intended to target girls specifically, children are being taught how to avert active shooters in their schools – the place they should feel the safest. This is no environment for children to grow up in and pursue their human right to development. Our children deserve better. Physical injuries from shootings are a visible reminder of an attack on the youngest, most innocent population that have to live with physical scarring for life. Distressingly, the psychological implications of witnessing, or being the victim of a mass shooting, forces children to grow up with severe anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, the inability to trust or even make new friends. They often no longer believe that the world is a safe place and can themselves turn to violence as they consider it to be the best means to protect themselves. These psychological traumas can be extremely challenging to overcome, and research has demonstrated that such trauma can increase chances of poor school performance, or even school dropout. This trauma that children are forced to endure, through no fault of their own, is an urgent call to action in and of itself. The international community must advocate for these innocent lives and for their right to life and a safe education.

In other contexts, children are being abducted from their schools in broad daylight. Indeed, between 2020 and 2021, over 1,000 children were kidnapped from their schools in one sole country. These attacks have been perpetrated by armed groups and criminal gangs who storm entry to schools, abducting children as young as just two years old. Children's lives are therefore put in severe danger, and surrounding schools are forced to close due to security risks, which has a domino effect on children enrolled there as more children are unable to enter their school premise for fear of their safety. Any violence involving child abduction and extortion must be investigated under International Criminal Law.

Blanket bans on women from entering all levels of education must be recognized as a form of structural violence that is being perpetrated specifically against women and girls. Such unprecedented bans on women and girls of all ages from a safe education is an outright violation of human rights and has resulted in women and girls being brutally silenced from biased and patriarchal systems designed by – and for – men. Such extreme violence perpetrated by state and non-state actors cannot be tolerated.

Bullying, including cyberbullying and harassment are other forms of school violence that must not be overlooked. Women and girls are among the most targeted victims of cyberbullying and are often victims of sexual exploitation, harassment and even trafficking. This is the tip of the iceberg. Global reported cases of sexual abuse and exploitation online are likely inaccurate due to the stigma attached to reporting such incidents. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated these severe issues, given a dramatic switch for many students to e-learning platforms and online schooling.

In addition, the increasing prevalence of war and armed conflict is inextricably linked to the exclusion of girls from school. Specifically, conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) “refers to rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, forced abortion, enforced sterilization, forced marriage, and any other form of sexual violence ... that is directly or indirectly linked to a conflict”. Such examples of CRSV are often perpetrated by non-state actors on civilians, including children of school age. Damning reports have also recently exposed extreme sexual violence being perpetrated by state and non-state actors as weapons of war on innocent civilians living in conflict affected countries. A disproportionate number of civilian women and girls have been victims of CRSV despite being most often uninvolved in the conflict itself. CRSV can not only cause lifelong physical and mental health implications for women and girls but can further limit girls’ access to education due to poor health, trauma, stigmatization, or even bearing an unwanted pregnancy. In 2020 and 2021, there were over 5,000 reported attacks on education and incidents of military use in schools and universities. This harmed more than 9,000 students and teachers across 85 countries. In other instances, schools have been burned, looted, and threatened by armed non-state actors.

Schools, colleges, and universities should be safe spaces for children, young people, and adults to learn and develop. By enrolling in education, women and girls can build their skills and knowledge that can be of vital and urgent assistance in helping them to support their families as well as their communities. Where girls and women have safe access to education, they have the potential to contribute to their communities social, cultural, political, and economic advancement. While attempting to prevent these goals is among the reasons that these attacks happen, it is the responsibility of the international community to ensure that justice for all women and girls prevails in every instance. For millions of women and girls around the world, the fundamental human right to education is not only being dismissed, but purposefully ignored and destroyed. Perpetrators, including both state and non-state actors are contributing to what now is a visibly global phenomenon where it has become dangerous for women and girls to access education.

The power of education is so much greater than any amount of terror and violence, be it physical, psychological, emotional, or sexual. Education is not a privilege; it is a human right that must be upheld for every woman and girl as it is for men and boys. Yet, at present, opportunities for entire generations are at risk of being lost – the potential teachers, doctors, and scientists, that the future relies on to combat the challenges that a digital world now faces. As a global community, it is our collective responsibility to ensure that no amount of terror can rob any woman or girl from their right to education. It is the responsibility of the global community to ensure that every educational space is safe, accessible, and free of all forms of violence and discrimination. Governments must give a high priority to prosecute any type of violent or discriminatory attack on schools and perpetrators must be held to account. Importantly, the international criminal justice system must review these documented atrocities on schools to ensure access to justice and to realize safe and secure societies.

Soroptimist International demands that women and girls have equal and fair access to systems of justice, insofar that their human right to a safe education is respected, protected and fulfilled in accordance with international human rights law, the Beijing Platform for Action and Conventions including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

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