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Statement submitted by the Youth Coalition for Sexual and Reproductive Rights in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

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

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

The Youth Coalition for Sexual and Reproductive Rights (YCSRR) is one of the co-convenors of the Young Feminist Caucus (YFC), a platform dedicated to youth-led organizing and advocacy within the UN system from a Global South perspective. YCSRR is submitting this joint statement on behalf of the YFC. The YFC represents adolescents and young people affected by sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and systemic barriers to justice. We center youth, adolescents, and girls from rural areas, informal settlements, Indigenous, Dalit, and tribal communities, religious and ethnic minorities, LGBTQIA+ communities, youth with disabilities, migrants, displaced youth, and those living in poverty, groups who face multiple and intersecting forms of oppression and violence, who are often invisible in laws, policies, and data.

Globally, laws and institutions reflect colonial, patriarchal, racist, and punitive legacies that reproduce exclusion rather than provide remedies. Discriminatory laws, particularly those targeting sexual orientation, gender identity, reproduction, migration, and collective organizing and protest, criminalize poverty, dissent, and identity. Young women, Indigenous peoples, racialized and gender-diverse communities remind us that the law often regulates bodies and choices instead of enabling rights. Justice means to live without fear, organize without permission, speak freely, and inherit a world not stolen from us. This requires dismantling structural inequalities, reparations for stolen land and resources, climate and ecological justice, and mechanisms to hold corporations, States, and institutions accountable for profiting from precarity.

Barriers to Access to Justice for Young People

Adolescents and young people face distinct barriers that make justice systems inaccessible and unsafe. Ambiguous age thresholds and inconsistent consent definitions criminalize consensual adolescent relationships. Exploitative adult behavior can evade scrutiny because laws are not structured to address & recognize power imbalances and coercion. Procedural barriers such as invasive questioning, public hearings, and retributive evidence requirements retraumatize survivors, while distance, costs, and parental consent rules block urgent or confidential support.

Data gaps worsen this invisibility, as justice, health, and protection systems rarely disaggregate by age, gender identity, disability, or other intersecting factors. LGBTQIA+ youth may be denied services or criminalized, while Indigenous, Tribal, Dalit, and minority ethnic youth face discrimination, language barriers, and geographic isolation. Even when formal access exists, cis-heteronormative legal systems and underfunded, adult-centric legal aid often make justice a hollow promise. Trauma-centered, inclusive systems that center rights, care, and accountability are essential.

Anti-rights actors & narratives weaponize the law to intimidate and discredit survivors and amplify the idea that gender-based protections are flawed or overused, framing survivors as unreliable and movements as illegitimate, undermining advocacy and pressuring institutions to abandon justice reforms.

Bodily Autonomy, Criminalization, and Gender Norms

Bodily autonomy for adolescents and young people is constrained and criminalized through law, policy, and practice. Criminalization manifests in multiple forms. Statutory provisions intended to protect can, in practice, punish consensual adolescent relationships. Structural biases in access to abortion, restricted availability of contraception, and requirements for parental consent for sexual and reproductive health services systematically limit young people's capacity to make decisions about their own bodies and health. Criminalization is reinforced by mandatory reporting rules, which strip young people of agency over disclosure and expose them to family or community reprisals. Such legal frameworks enable surveillance and control of young bodies rather than protection.

Regressive gender norms sustain and reproduce SGBV by enforcing expectations of control, honor, and sexuality, and by permitting abuses such as marital rape. These harmful norms operate as practical rules that dictate who may speak, who must remain silent, and who can claim bodily autonomy. Norms that valorize male authority, reproduce patriarchal narratives, or stigmatize sexuality create social incentives to conceal coercion, prioritize family reputation over survivor

safety, and perpetuate cycles of violence. Norms that equate dignity with silence use shame and euphemisms to hide violence and block access to justice. For LGBTQIA+ youth, these norms translate into erasure, criminalization, and denial of identity-based harms. Gender norms intersect with race, class, caste, ethnicity, religion, disability, and migration status, creating unequal risks and deepening barriers to safety and justice.

Justice for Environmental and Land Defenders

Land and territory defenders face persistent threats, harassment, and violence for resisting resource exploitation and environmental destruction. Global Minority countries allow extractive companies to harm ecosystems and target community leaders, including through killings and disappearances. Indigenous and rural activists are disproportionately affected, and women, girls, and gender-diverse defenders face heightened risks of SGVB, harassment, retaliation, and criminalization.

Effectiveness of the International Justice System

The international justice system continues to struggle to hold perpetrators of genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity accountable. Delays, selective prosecutions, and political influence undermine effectiveness and erode trust in justice mechanisms. We are particularly concerned about access to justice for Palestinian, Congolese, and Sudanese youth, whose communities face ongoing violence and systemic violations with no prospect of accountability.

We call State Members to:

1. Legal Reform for Bodily Autonomy

Dismantle discriminatory and punitive laws that police bodies and identities. Repeal laws that criminalize poverty, reproductive autonomy, gender expression, or migration status. Recognize that young people experience the law as a mechanism of control over their bodies and choices. Transform legal systems into tools for protection, care, and equality. Harmonize laws to remove punitive measures against consensual adolescent relationships, eliminate ambiguous age thresholds, and guarantee unrestricted access to contraceptives, abortion, and sexual health services without

parental consent or mandatory reporting. Embed anti-racist and feminist principles throughout justice systems, diversify the judiciary, integrate intersectional feminist and anti-racist analysis into legal education, and institute community-led oversight mechanisms.

2. Community-Based and Restorative Justice

Prioritize restorative and transformative justice models that repair rather than punish. Support community legal empowerment and strengthen Indigenous and community-based justice systems, and shift funding from punitive systems to social protection, education, and prevention. Regulate customary and informal justice mechanisms to ensure survivor consent and prohibit child, early and forced marriage, or coerced reconciliation/monetary settlements as legal outcomes.

3. Youth-Centered Services

Guarantee free legal aid, counseling, and youth-centered social services. Establish emergency rapid-response funds for shelter, relocation, and economic stabilization accessible via youth-led organizations. Implement trauma-informed protocols in the healthcare and justice sectors, including confidential reporting, survivor-paced interviews, same-gender officials, privacy safeguards, and the elimination of retributive or invasive investigations. Ensure law enforcement, prosecutors, and judiciary staff undergo mandatory training in adolescent rights, trauma-sensitive practices, and cultural competency, with performance metrics tied to reforms and case handling quality.

4. Data, Participation, and Norm Change

Collect and publicly report age-, gender-, and disability-disaggregated justice, health, and social protection data, ensuring participatory design with youth inputs. Institutionalize meaningful youth participation by engaging young feminist collectives with decision-making authority in justice reform, monitoring, budget planning, and legal reviews.

5. International Justice

Strengthen international justice mechanisms including the International Court of Justice, the International Criminal Court, and UN bodies to hold perpetrators of genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity accountable without political influence or impunity, while protecting

judicial independence from coercion and harassment. Prioritize justice for communities affected by disproportionate violence and inequality in Palestine, Congo, Sudan, and other regions. Exercise universal jurisdiction, cooperate fully with the ICC, and guarantee reparations for survivors. International justice must center accountability, care, and equality

6. Corporate Accountability

Implement binding and enforceable mechanisms to hold corporations accountable for extractive, austerity-driven, and exploitative practices, and hold them accountable for environmental destruction, exploitation, and human rights violations.

7. Access to Justice for Land and Territory Defenders

Ensure robust protection and access to justice for environmental and land defenders, including Indigenous, rural, and community-based activists. Investigate and prosecute threats, harassment, and violence, guarantee legal and physical protection, and hold both state and corporate actors accountable. Give special attention to defenders at the frontlines of extractive and environmental exploitation.

8. Structural Transformation and Reparations

Commit to deep structural change across justice systems, including debt cancellation, climate and ecological reparations, wealth redistribution, land back and water rights, and dismantling extractive and neocolonial economic models. Governance and development systems must be decolonized, anti-neoliberal, and accountable. End economic exploitation, militarization, and extractive practices that disproportionately harm youth and adolescents from marginalized communities.

9. Protection of Civic Space

Safeguard freedom of speech, assembly, digital access, and organizing. Protect human rights defenders, activists, and feminist movements from harassment, criminalization, surveillance, and all forms of violence. Support feminist movements with sustainable, accessible, and flexible resources.

We call on Member States to translate CSW's agreed conclusions into measurable actions, including legal reviews with transparent timelines, dedicated budgets for youth-centered justice services, and independent monitoring with public progress reports.