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SSND students to share their stories at Commission on the Status of Women

When the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women convenes next week, it will provide an extraordinary opportunity for girls worldwide, including eight students attending with the School Sisters of Notre Dame, to tell their stories in a public forum.

The annual two-week meeting of the commission, February 26-March 9, will focus on the plight of girls. The commission will set standards and urge actions to end discrimination and violence against girls. According to the commission, girls are denied education, refused health care, subjected to female genital mutilation, and exploited both sexually and economically.

“Many things have been done to try and stop discrimination and violence, yet I feel like so many people in these organizations and our society continue to have our eyes closed, said Jamie St. Eve, a student who will be attending from Notre Dame High School in St. Louis, Mo. “More people should be educated and informed so that they too can see the discrimination against women in our society.”

The School Sisters of Notre Dame invited their students to share their thoughts on the critical issues facing girls worldwide. Their responses illustrate an insightful and empathetic understanding of the topics facing girls today. The students’ voices echo the urgency that is needed to implement actions to empower girls, a concern that reflects the SSND vision and mission.

“The first step toward the empowerment of girls is letting them know that it is possible,” said Caitlin Byrnes, a student who will be attending from St. Saviour High School in Brooklyn, N.Y. “By implementing strong, positive female influences in their lives, girls will know that they can achieve empowerment. If these girls are given someone to look up to, in the end, they will be stronger. Governments should be responsible for the creation of education that can be available for all children. Through these schools, girls will gain knowledge necessary for empowerment.”

UNICEF has also offered youth a forum for their voices to be heard, providing a youth version of the “Report of the Expert Group Meeting on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination and Violence Against the Girl Child.” By responding to the report, SSND students were offered another way to participate in the ongoing dialogue from afar. Those statements also will be submitted to the CSW.

“There are laws in place, but they are not enforced,” was the conclusion of 40 students from Notre Dame Girls Senior Secondary School in Sunyani, Ghana. “Steps must be taken to ensure that they are strictly enforced. The government should do all in its power to improve the lives of the citizens. More jobs must be created, minimum wage must be increased, and money should be used for the good of the people and society. A stop must be put to corruption and corrupt practices.

“All of society must change their mindset regarding the inferiority of girls. Until the girl child is seen and acknowledged as equal to the boy child by others and by the girl herself it will take many years to make a difference.”

Some 200 girls, including the eight SSND students, will be part of the 4,000 Non-Governmental Organization and government delegates from countries from every continent. The SSND students represent schools in Ghana, Germany, Peru and the United States, including Baltimore, Md.; St. Louis, Mo.; Brooklyn, N.Y., and Demarest, N.J.

During the meeting, girls will have the opportunity to speak for themselves on the floor of the United Nations, addressing governments and NGO delegates. They will organize their own caucuses, and they will develop their own strategies to use when they go home.

“It’s unimaginable that the world is divided like this,” said Nadine Binder, a student at Brede Gymnasium in Brakel, Germany. “I know that there are problems concerning girls or women, even in Germany, where everything seems to be perfect due to emancipation. It was never my favourite topic to discuss about with parents and friends, but by now, I’m really into it and willing to change something because I see a world full of violence and discrimination against girls, characterized by old traditions and beliefs.

“We are the youth, we are the next generation to rule over this world and we are the ones who can change it – let’s do it!”

The congregation of the School Sisters of Notre Dame is an international community of women religious. The sisters and their colleagues seek to empower women, youth and persons who are poor or marginalized and strive to change systems of poverty and injustice. Nearly 4,000 School Sisters of Notre Dame minister in 35 countries in Europe, North America, Latin America, Asia, Africa and Oceania. The School Sisters of Notre Dame has been a registered NGO with the U.N.’s Department of Public Information since 1993.

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To read more about what our youth are saying, visit

http://www.ssnd.org/External/News&Events/CSW/csw_youthvoices.htm

Learn more about the Working Group on Girls at <http://www.girlsrights.org/Default.php> and The NGO Committee on the Status of Women at http://ngocsw.org/index.php?option=com_frontpage&Itemid=1

Additional information about the Commission on the Status of Women is available at <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/51sess.htm>

For more information about the School Sisters of Notre Dame, please visit <http://www.gerhardinger.org/english/index.htm> or <http://www.ssnd.org/>