A girl is born . . . a girl voices out against violence to seek protection – The Speak-Out for Girls Campaign at the Beijing Fourth World Conference on Women and the NGO Forum on Women 1995

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The biggest concern of the girl children is how to voice out their rights as persons so that they can be protected.

Arlene Albis, 15, street vendor
Streetchildren and Childworkers Support Centre – Philippines

Young girls all over the world are making strides in speaking out about the forms of abuse, neglect, violence and exploitation committed against them.¹

As a social group made vulnerable and in need of special protection, they are now seeking protection and recognition as equal and valuable members of society.

The problem of girl children is that they are being neglected and uncared of. They see her as a plaything, and they slave her like an animal and one more thing, once they know that the baby in the womb is a girl, they kill it.

Diana de la Cruz, 13, vendor
Streetchildren and Childworkers Support Centre – Philippines

Unequivocally, there is an urgent need to address the plight of girl children. Girls are the victims of various forms of gender-based violence and discrimination in many countries, amounting more frequently than not to gross violations of their human rights. In the Philippines alone, close to one-half (27.7 million) of the total population of children and youth – which is 45.8% of the total population of 62 million (NCSO 1990) – is female. Of this figure, a significant number belong to families living below the poverty line. These girls are also the most marginalized and are exposed to various types of perils. Given the feudal and semi-colonial nature of the patriarchal society

of the Philippines, these girls are the first to be systematically excluded from enjoying basic rights such as nutrition, education and medical care. They are also the most at risk to become victims of child prostitution, sexual assaults and child domestic labour. Young Filipina girls of today spend more time toiling in the streets, fields, brothels and factories because they are expected to contribute more to familial earning or income. They are also required to assume other domestic responsibilities, such as cleaning the house, attending to siblings, cooking, washing clothes and dishes, etc. Despite their great economic and domestic contribution to their families and communities, prejudice and discrimination against them continues to exist mainly because of their gender.2

The phenomenon of giving less regard to girl children is not only prevalent in the Philippines but also in other parts of the world, particularly in Third World Asian countries. In Indian subcontinents, as well as in China, South Korea and Taiwan, son preference exists because many parents believe that they must have at least one son to provide economic security and for ritual reasons. Such beliefs also lead to preferential treatment of sons and daughter neglect in the areas of education, health and food.3 In Bangladesh, for example, malnutrition is four to five times higher among girls than boys.4 Preference for sons can also lead to gross injustices such as abortion and female infanticide.5 In India and China a genetic test called amniocentesis exists which


5 See generally, Narasimham, Sakuntala, “The Unwanted Sex”, The New Internationalist, No. 240, Girls and Girlhood, Time We Were Noticed, 1993, pp. 9–11; Mascaranhas, Marie