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.

Female Genital Mutilation is one of the most widespread and systematic violations of the universal human right to personal integrity, committed against millions of women and girls worldwide, abusing their physical and psychological and damaging their lives irreversibly. It is an affront to human dignity, a violation of fundamental human rights, and is increasingly being
recognised as such by children, women and men around the world. The development of political will at the highest levels, encouraged by and in turn encouraging action at the grassroots levels, is one of the most important achievements of the past decade for the fight against FGM. The Nonviolent Radical Party, Transnational and Transparty, together with No Peace Without Justice, the Inter-African Committee on Traditional Practices, the European Network for the Prevention and Eradication of Harmful Traditional Practices and La Palabra have been engaged in an International Campaign for a world-wide ban on Female Genital Mutilation by the United Nations. All partners take this opportunity to thank and congratulate Member States and UN Agencies that have supported this campaign, the leaders in African capitals and around the world that have contributed their commitment and political will, and the thousands of women, men from all walks of life that have supported the Campaign.

The vision of the Nonviolent Radical Party, Transnational and Transparty and our partners in Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, the Middle East, Southeast Asia and other places still afflicted by this harmful practice is a world where FGM lives on only in the history books.

This is why a United Nations General Assembly Resolution is so important: it recognises once and for all that FGM is a human rights violation; acknowledges its gravity and effect on the lives of millions of people; and demonstrates clear commitment and political will at the highest levels to ban it. It reinforces the importance of previous UN declarations protecting the rights of women and children and mirrors important steps already taken at the regional level. The African Union, for example, has voiced its commitment to the elimination of FGM in the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, which requires member States to adopt all political and legislative measures necessary
to eliminate FGM completely. Furthermore, it encourages the speedy ratification and implementation of international and regional conventions, such as the Maputo Protocol, that recognise female genital mutilation as a violation of fundamental human rights. Action by the UN General Assembly steps up and signals the international community’s universal condemnation of this blatant human rights violation, with important implications worldwide. Critically, it contributes significantly to a global change in the perception of FGM as a clear human rights violation against millions of women around the world, instead of masking it merely as a cultural, religious or public health issue. All of these characterisations, which were effectively euphemisms that had shielded decision-makers from the need to take action, were common parlance in the past. A UNGA Resolution helps strengthen the development of a political and social environment that challenges attitudes and behaviours on FGM and facilitates its elimination. It does so by recognising FGM for what it is, a form of sexual violence against children and women, and helping to shift the discourse, and the required response, accordingly.

A UNGA Resolution also helps strengthen the development of a legal environment that can support and lead political and social commitment to ending FGM by stating clearly that No FGM means No FGM, with the back-up of the full force of the law. By providing indications and recommendations on elements for effective national legislation, a Resolution can help the adoption of national legislation to ban FGM that includes sanctions for those continuing the practice, as a clear, unequivocal and tangible sign of the State’s commitment to eliminate it. A UNGA Resolution serves to strengthen laws that currently ban FGM by reinforcing their legitimacy and provides new impetus for those countries that currently do not have such laws
on the books. It helps to ease the path towards the most effective legislation in countries where FGM is committed, by providing standards and recommendations, including the facilitation of exchanges of information on how best to eliminate FGM. It encourages the allocation of sufficient resources for the effective implementation of legislation and action plans aimed at eliminating FGM, which is important both as a political statement of the importance of the issue and as a practical means of accomplishing its elimination. It also provides an impetus for donors, be they State or private, to include and prioritise the elimination of FGM in their programming, allowing them to provide vital support for those who have been working towards ending FGM, often at financial loss.

Most importantly, a UN General Assembly ban on FGM reinforces the efforts of the thousands of activists working at the national, regional and international levels to see FGM consigned to the history books. It celebrates those who were brave enough to speak out against FGM when it was a taboo to do so and heartens those who still work in such environments, often at great personal risk. It both encourages and provides legitimacy for those working for the enactment of and compliance with legislation prohibiting the practice. By recognising and celebrating laws that already exist, a UN General Assembly Resolution helps bestow legitimacy on those people who are campaigning for legislation in those States that do not yet have a law, aiding their struggle by showing that the international community is firmly on their side. It acknowledges the courage of the women and girls who have said no to FGM and helps give confidence to those who want to say no but have lacked the support to do so.

This, in the end, is the crux of the matter: the impact of a UNGA Resolution lies not in the halls of buildings in New York or Geneva, but in the lives of ordinary people, many of whom will
never visit those buildings but who look to the United Nations, its member States and agencies to help make their world a better place. The urgent need to help to raise awareness, to support victims and to protect women and girls who are at risk, by involving all sectors and level of the society, is given a boost when the international community speaks as a whole and takes an unequivocal and joint stance.