



# General Assembly

Distr.: General  
19 June 2012

English only

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## Human Rights Council

Twentieth session

Agenda item 3

**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,  
political, economic, social and cultural rights,  
including the right to development**

**Joint written statement\* submitted by the International  
Women's Rights Action Watch Asia Pacific, the International  
Association of Democratic Lawyers – IADL, the Pan Pacific  
and South East Asia Women's Association, Women Against  
violence Europe – WAVE, non-governmental organizations  
in special consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[4 June 2012]

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\* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

## **Addressing gender stereotype to prevent and contrast violence against women in Italy(VAW)\*<sup>1</sup>**

The Worldwide Organization for Women (WOW), on behalf of Fondazione Pangea onlus, along with Giuristi Democratici, and D.I.R.E, part of the Italian CSO Platform “30 years CEDAW: work in progress”<sup>2</sup>, draws the attention of the United Nations Human Rights Council to the alarming trend violations of women’s rights in Italy.

### **Introduction on the CSO Italian platform**

Pangea Foundation coordinates the CSO Italian platform “30 YEARS CEDAW: work in progress”, a network of organizations and experts engaged on women’s rights and the promotion of gender equality.

The Platform promotes women’s rights awareness raising and advocacy initiatives all over Italy. The CSO Platform drafted and presented the first Italian Shadow Report<sup>3</sup> in the 49 CEDAW session in 2011 in NY<sup>4</sup>, to the UN CEDAW Committee<sup>5</sup>.

The Shadow Report was also submitted to the UN Special Rapporteur on gender violence, for the section on violence, and was submitted to UN women, directly to Mrs Bachelet.

The CSO Platform is now monitoring the implementation of the CEDAW Concluding Observations particularly as far as stereotypes, violence against women, work and welfare are concerned. The platform has a formal dialogue with the Italian Institutions regarding the CEDAW implementation in our country.

### **The advocacy work on VAW**

The CSO Platform is active in gathering the main organizations and experts in a working group which undertakes common initiatives on VAW in Italy. Pangea Foundation and this working group started an advocacy work with some parliamentarians sensitive and interested in the issue to promote motions and political actions on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women as requested by the CEDAW Committee, in order to urge the Government to:

- ratify the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence,
- review and implement the Italian National Action Plan on gender violence,
- set up an appropriate system of data collection on all forms of violence against women.

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\* Pangea foundation, .I.R.E.-Italian Shelters' Network Against Violence, Giuristi democratici CSO Italian Platform “30 years CEDAW: work in progress, WURN – women’s Un report network, NGOs without consultative status, also share the views expressed in this statement.

<sup>1</sup> From now onwards VAW as Violence against Women.

<sup>2</sup> From now onwards CSO Platform.

<sup>3</sup> On the 6th Italian Govt.Periodic Report.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cedaw/cedaws49.htm>.

<sup>5</sup> From now onwards Committee.

## **New culture against gender stereotypes to prevent and contrast VAW**

In Italy the political debates and the mass media continuously repeat a degrading representation of women, through a sexist language and the revival of stereotypes and gender roles. Politicians increasingly use sexist expressions, which stresses the importance of beauty as a success factor for women in politics and in the career development. In many TV shows, women are nearly ornamental presences: almost naked and silent. In the advertisement female naked bodies are used to sell everything.

Generally it is still widespread the stereotype “men as leaders/breadwinners and women/girls as cares/mothers” or alternatively “women as sexual objects or femme fatale”. The perpetuation of these stereotypes harms women in different ways.

Firstly they degrade women, diminishing their dignity and marginalizing them, debasing women’s competence and hampering an equal participation in the public sphere (women are 20% of the National Parliament members and are under-represented in most of the sectors and professions).

Secondly these stereotypes restrict women to culturally acceptable roles or behaviors, stigmatizing and punishing those women who fail to conform to such roles or behaviors, making them guilty or responsible for provoking violent acts and reactions by men.

The Italian mass media also need a major change of the language used in broadcast the phenomenon of violence against women. For example femmicidio cases are presented as the result of crimes passion, a sudden and unpredictable action of men victims of raptus and "murderous folly", omitting that in reality it is the epilogue of a crescendo of violence one-sided, perpetrated by stereotypes, by traditions and cultures.

Italian CSO raised the issues and the need of working at cultural level against gender stereotypes to prevent and contrast gender violence at all levels and in all places of the society.

Prevention of VAW starts from a fair and balanced representation of gender roles and a use of no sexist language to promote a respectful relationship and balance of powers between men and women.

It is therefore crucial to act at the level of awareness and consequently on the cultural plan for a rewording of gender relations and for a framework of gender-based violence in the context of human rights specific to women.

## **CEDAW recommendation and Italian Government responsibilities on stereotype & VAW**

In the VI CEDAW Italian Periodic Report, the Government recognizes that gender stereotypes in Italy are deeply rooted everywhere even in the younger generations and could be conveyed through didactical programs, culture and mass media.

In 2005 the Committee on CEDAW had recommended to Italy to encourage the media and advertising agencies in the dissemination of “an image of women as equal partners in all areas of life. ” In 2011 this recommendation is revived and is even more highlighted as central point of democratic development, cultural, social and economic.

The recommendations of 2011 urge the development of a long-term strategy for combating such stereotypes and the adoption of a national plan for the promotion of school and university programs that take into account gender differences, backgrounds and cultures.

Furthermore the CEDAW Convention States that it is the responsibility of the institutions act to change these stereotypes and prevent and contrast VAW.

The Italian equal opportunities system has been characterized by a complex functioning and the lack of a homogeneous mission. The Ministry of Equal Opportunities is without portfolio and the responsibilities are shared among different ministries and a bunch of equal opportunities bodies at the local and national level. Those bodies are often insufficiently funded to carry out proper coordinated interventions. Actually the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs is in charge of the Equal Opportunities. The absence of an independent ministry devoted to gender discrimination and gender-based violence contributes to worsen the difficulties encountered by Italian institutions in defining effective long-term coordinated strategies to contrast the widespread acceptance of gender stereotypes, and acting in prevention and contrasting VAW.

### **Government good example**

In November 2011 the Italian Government changed: in the new technocrat government 3 out of the 16 ministries are women: the Minister of Labour and Social Affairs, in charge of the Equal Opportunities too (the previous department was included in this Ministry), the Minister of Justice, the Minister of the Interior. It's the first time that three women cover this kind of position in Italy.

The political change slow down the process and the policies related to gender equality. The appointment of these 3 Ministries marked a good progress not only in the political participation of women in the decision-making process but also in giving positive examples of women against sex-role stereotypes.

### **Recommendation**

We call upon Italian State to respect, fulfil and implement 2011 Concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and Recommendations of the UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women.

We urge Italian State to quickly ratify the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, in a timely manner.

We remind Italian State of its obligation to exercise its due diligence obligations with regard to prevent, investigate, prosecute, punish and compensate for violence against women as well as provide services for women survivors of VAW including shelters;

We remind Italian State to review and implement the Italian National Action Plan on gender violence;

We urge Italian State to quickly set up an appropriate coordinate system of data collection on all forms of violence against women among all the ministries interested with ISTAT (Italian National Statistic Institute), the women CSO, the national network of shelters for women (D.I.R.E.);

We encourage the political debate and in the adoption of laws and policies that avoid prejudices;

We promote the involvement of civil society organizations expert from a gender perspective on stereotype and VAW.

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Based on its obligations with regard to VAW and stereotype we urge Italian Government:

- to ensure that justice for violence against women is not delayed, denied or outsourced to the widespread acceptance of stereotypical roles of men and women;
- to develop at national level and implement at local programs for school and university, to educate to gender relations, sexuality, identification and deconstruction of stereotypes, violence against women;
- to train journalist on the issue of VAW and the use of a proper and correct languages to broadcast and divulgate information about episodes of VAW and women discriminations;
- promoting research on the use of gender stereotypes offensive of women and girls in the media, able to highlight monitor the messages disrespectful of the rights of women and children contrasting and preventing VAW;
- in the media and in advertisements to make a comprehensive, sustained and coordinated policy, to overcome the portrayal of women as sexual objects and stereotypes regarding their roles in society and in the family.