



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
31 January 2006

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women

Fiftieth session

27 February-10 March 2006

Item 3 (c) (i) of the provisional agenda*

Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”: implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: enhanced participation of women in development: an enabling environment for achieving gender equality and the advancement of women, taking into account, inter alia, the fields of education, health and work

Statement submitted by Gray Panthers, Human Lactation Center, International Association of Applied Psychology, International Association of Schools of Social Work, International Federation of Business and Professional Women, International Federation of Social Workers, International Federation of Women in Legal Careers, International Federation of Women Lawyers, International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies, International Union of Psychological Science, National Council of Women of the United States, Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues, Soroptimist International, World Council for Psychotherapy, World Federation for Mental Health and Zonta International, non-governmental organizations 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 27 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

* E/CN.6/2006/1.

Statement

We, the international Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council and members of the NGO Committee on Mental Health, working under the auspices of the Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations (CONGO) in Consultative Status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council, are committed to the promotion of mental health, psychological and societal well-being, the prevention and treatment of mental illness and emotional distress, and the improvement in the delivery and quality of mental health services through advocacy and education at the United Nations. Historically, mental health has been overlooked or minimized in discussions at the UN. The importance of maintaining full mental health for all people is recognized by the World Health Organization in its Constitution when it states that *“health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity; the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being without distinction of race, religion, political belief, economic or social condition; and that the health of all peoples is fundamental to the attainment of peace and security and is dependent upon the fullest cooperation of individuals and States.”*

The NGO Committee on Mental Health and its members have worked diligently to call attention to the importance of gender and mental health in our advocacy at the United Nations. Both women and men have a basic human right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. Fundamental to this goal is the implementation and vigorous enforcement of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Beijing Platform for Action, the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women and other binding human rights treaties, conventions and covenants. However, inadequate attention has been given to mental health in the follow-up and subsequent implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and in the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals (MDG).

Addressing the mental health needs of women is an integral part of creating an enabling environment for women's enhanced participation in development. Unless the focus on health is expanded to include the consideration of both mental and physical health, any discussion of the interrelationships among health, education, and work is inadequate. According to the *World Health Report* (2001), by 2020 mental and neurological disorders will account for 15% of the global burden of disease.

Women's full capabilities can be utilized only if their psychosocial well-being at home, in their community, and in their society is valued. Empowerment takes place when women are supported in the development of self-confidence and self-worth. This comes through women attaining higher levels of education, appropriate, satisfying work, and full access to mental and physical health care that addresses their gender-specific needs. High levels of anxiety, depression, grief, stress in women, and low self-esteem can be the result of such factors as poverty, domestic violence, rape, trafficking, HIV/AIDS, destruction of traditional family systems, exploitation in sweatshops, isolation, poor nutrition and illiteracy. These conditions must be recognized and addressed because they limit women's potential and impede development. Discriminatory practices, based on gender stereotypes, cultural traditions, and stigma, which restrict women's access to appropriate and affordable mental health care must be eliminated.

Recommended Action Priorities:

- In its deliberations, the Commission on the Status of Women should recognize that mental health is a critical element in creating an enabling environment for women's participation in development;
- In order to recognize the significance of mental health in women's lives, as a general practice throughout the CSW documents and agreed conclusions, the specific words *“physical and mental health”* should be used in place of the general term *“health”*;
- Governments, the UN system, NGOs, and the private sector should integrate mental health as a priority issue into all levels of policy and program development. The promotion of psychosocial well being and the improvement of mental health care must be included within a broader range of concerns, such as

health, violence, post-conflict/disaster reconstruction, sustainable development, the eradication of poverty, and human rights. Recognizing that human rights violations may cause mental health hazards, we ask that appropriate actions be taken against all offenders;

- Discrimination against women and girls in mental and physical health care must be eliminated and appropriate mental health care for women throughout the life cycle should be available. All measures should be taken to diminish, if not eradicate, the stigma attached to women with psychiatric disabilities and other psychological problems;
 - Enhanced mental health education and training should be given to primary health care workers, social service professionals, educators, clergy and other healers so that mental health issues are adequately addressed.
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