



## Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General  
11 December 2007

Original: English

---

### **Commission on the Status of Women**

#### **Fifty-second session**

25 February-7 March 2008

Item 3 (a) (i) of the provisional agenda\*

#### **Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women**

**and to the twenty-third 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: financing for gender equality and the**

**empowerment of women**

### **Statement submitted by the International Federation of Social Workers, a non-governmental organization 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 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

---

\* E/CN.6/2008/1.



## Statement

At the 52<sup>nd</sup> Session of the Commission on the Status of Women, the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) is acutely aware of the possibilities as well as challenges that face women in a rapidly changing world. Founded in 1955, the International Federation of Social Workers represents 500,000 social workers in professional associations from 84 different countries around the world. IFSW is a global organisation that strives for the promotion of social justice, human rights and social development through the development of social work, best practices and international cooperation between social workers and their professional organisations (IFSW, 2007). With our goal of promoting human rights and social justice for all people, we are particularly concerned about advocating for those who are most disadvantaged and vulnerable in our society.

As stated in the IFSW and International Association of Schools of Social Work *Ethics in Social Work: Statement of Principles*, “Social work is based on respect for the inherent worth and dignity of all people, and the rights that follow from this. Social workers should uphold and defend each person’s physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual integrity and well-being” (IFSW & IASSW, 2004, p. 2). These basic principles inform and direct our professional work in advancing the status of women around the world.

For a number of years the International Federation of Social Workers has had a policy on women’s issues that has delineated our NGO’s position on the rights of women (IFSW, 1999). We view women’s rights as human rights and are particularly in support of the theme of this year’s CSW - Financing for gender inequality and the empowerment of women. This theme relates to the third Millennium Development Goal, which is to empower women and promote equality between men and women. In this era of political, social and economic unrest, as well as natural disasters and climate change, we strongly urge governments to consider these six crucial issues that impact women around the world:

### 1. Poverty

Women represent the majority of the 1.3 billion people who live in poverty worldwide. (Briggs, 1995). In poor countries girls more frequently suffer from malnutrition than boys, while in more developed countries women who live without a male partner are more likely to be poor (Beijing Conference, 1995; US Census, 2000). Around the world women with special physical, mental, or emotional disabilities often are particularly disadvantaged and may have the worst struggles with poverty. Finally, indigenous women around the world often lack opportunities and are among the poorest people in all countries (IFSW, 2005). Women urgently need greater economic opportunity and mechanisms for economic and social support in order to avoid poverty.

### 2. The Economy

Although women do the majority of the world’s work, women do not share equally in income, savings, and wealth. Women often face discrimination having to do with job opportunities,

educational deprivation, and competing responsibilities. Because women are the primary bread winners in many families, economic discrimination often detrimentally affects their children and other household members. Elimination of discrimination in employment as well as the creation of new economic opportunities in private enterprise, agriculture, and formal places of employment are seen as ways to enable women to overcome poverty (IFSW, 1999). We strongly support a variety of major and innovative economic programmes and investments that foster the economic self-sufficiency of women as they struggle to support their families. These include ownership and registration of land and other property, micro-credit lending for family-run endeavours, and programmes aimed at providing the skills and educational opportunities to families that will enhance their economic position in society. Child care is often a major responsibility for women and access to affordable child care is also seen as vital to increasing employment opportunities and reducing poverty for women.

### **3. Education and training**

The right to education is seen as an important human right and the second Millennium Development Goal promotes universal primary education (UN, 2000). Yet 2/3 of those who are illiterate are women (United Nations Development Programme, 1995) and this factor continually hampers women's ability to support themselves and their families. In countries with non-mandatory, limited access to education, girls are often not allowed to attend school at all and thus remain illiterate. Finally, girls who are forced to migrate because of natural disasters and man-made conflicts may not be able to pursue education. The lack of even primary school education may forever diminish a woman's opportunity for economic self-sufficiency.

### **4. Health**

The lack of good health and health care is an important issue for women around the world. Over ten years ago, the Beijing Platform for Action (1995) recognized the importance of mental health along with physical, social, sexual, and reproductive health. Yet many women continue to experience poor physical and mental health because of violence, inadequate nutrition, and lack of health care. In some developing countries the risk of a woman dying in childbirth may be as high as one in 7 (WHO, 2007). Reducing maternal mortality by  $\frac{3}{4}$  is seen as an important millennium goal and a positive step is that a number of countries have adopted maternal health programmes. Finally, the number of women affected by HIV, the stigma attached to this illness, and how their compromised health detrimentally affects their ability to be economically self-sufficient and raise their families are of great concern.

### **5. Violence**

Violence against women knows no borders. Women from different ethnic, racial, national, and class backgrounds around the world are often subject to violent attacks. Gender-specific violence includes emotional, physical, sexual, verbal assaults, elder abuse, sexual harassment, rape, sexual exploitation and trafficking, forced pregnancy, forced abortion and sterilization

(IFSW, 1999). Finally, national laws often do not protect women against domestic violence and other types of violence.

## **6. Girls**

Discrimination against women often begins early in life. Prenatal selection, female infanticide or abandonment, child sexual abuse, genital mutilation and inadequate nutrition and health care detrimentally affect the number of girls who will even reach adulthood (IFSW, 1999). Young girls often face early marriage and/or parenthood, which further affects their ability to pursue education and become economically self-sufficient.

We firmly believe that the preceding six topics outline critical needs for women throughout the world. These issues must be given serious consideration by governments, business, and civil society, and action must be taken as we move forward in our attempt to implement the Millennium Development Goals.

## **References**

Beijing Platform for Action (1995), adopted at United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women. September 1995.

Briggs, M. Ed (1995). *Connections I*(6), Washington, DC: Alliance for a Global Community

IFSW (1999). International Policy on Women, Approved by IFSW Executive Committee, Helsinki, Finland, June 1999.

IFSW (2005), International Policy on Indigenous Peoples, Approved at the IFSW Executive Meeting, Washington, DC, USA, May 2, 2005)

IFSW (2007) IFSW Statement of Purpose, [www.ifsw.org/home](http://www.ifsw.org/home), website last updated on 06.12.2007

IFSW & IASSW (2004) *Ethics in Social Work: Statement of Principles*, adopted in Adelaide Australia, October 2004

United Nations Development Programme. (1995). Gender and Human Development Report 1995. New York: Oxford University Press.

UN (2000). Millennium Development Goals. Adopted by all member states  
<http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/MDGs-FACTSHEET1.pdf>

US Census, (2000) Poverty Status of Families, by Type of Family,  
<http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/histpov/hstpov4.html>

WHO, 2007. *Maternal Mortality in 2005: Estimates developed by WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA, and the World Bank*. Geneva, Switzerland: World Health Organization, retrieved from [http://www.who.int/reproductive-health/publications/maternal\\_mortality\\_2005/mme\\_2005.pdf](http://www.who.int/reproductive-health/publications/maternal_mortality_2005/mme_2005.pdf)

---