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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: the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS

Statement submitted by Education International, International Trade Union Confederation and Public Services 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 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/CN.6/2009/1.



Statement*

Gender inequalities are one of the major reasons for the HIV/AIDS pandemic affecting women and girls. Women comprise 50% of people living with HIV/AIDS and in some parts of the world the number reaches 60%. Education and information are some of the most effective tools to prevent HIV/AIDS infection of women and girls. Worldwide, 774 million adults lack basic literacy skills. Some 64% of them are women, a share virtually unchanged since the early 1990s.

The respect of women's reproductive rights, the access to appropriate health care gives protection to the spread of the pandemic, which is the trigger for millions of orphans under age 18, and which is expected to exceed 25 million by 2010. There is an urgent need for attention to women and girls as the most vulnerable groups in this context.

The promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women, as outlined in the third Millennium Development Goal, tackles poverty, discrimination and illiteracy. Achieving these goals is clearly linked to access to equal opportunities in education, decent work and health care. Nevertheless, family responsibilities remain with women. The gender division of responsibilities in the household detracts from economic growth and development; women are restricted from full economic participation by the demands of their household work while men are still uninvolved in care work.

We, Non-Governmental Organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council members of the trade union international movement, reaffirm our commitment and call attention to the situation of workers, particularly women workers around the world. These women continue to be confined to vulnerable and informal employment because of a responsibility to the family, which men do not yet fully share.

We acknowledge and support the important steps taken by the adoption of International Labour Organization Conventions on Maternity Protection (n° 183, 2000), Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, (No. 156, 1981), and the Workers with Family Responsibilities Recommendation, 1981 (No. 165); we strongly request their ratification and full implementation by all Member States. We also recognise the very valuable contribution of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women resolutions taken by the international community. The 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the Agreed Conclusions 1996/3 on "Child and dependent care, including sharing of work and family responsibilities", Resolution 52/4 "Women, the Girl Child and HIV/AIDS", and the 2008 Agreed Conclusions on "Financing for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women" are only a few examples of that commitment.

1. As women workers, members of trade unions all over the world, we would like to call the attention of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women to the fact that a substantial body of research has shown very consistently that women spend considerably more time than men in unpaid tasks related to caring for children and elders, cooking, cleaning, collecting food, water or firewood, among other tasks. Unpaid family responsibilities affect whether women can undertake paid work, the type of work, for how long, and where. Family responsibilities are one of the reasons women turn to vulnerable and

* Issued without formal editing.

informal employment. Women increasingly occupy employment in unregulated sectors and are often the only ones to meet the family's survival.

2. We draw attention to the fact that where States fail to provide adequate public health, childcare, publicly-funded education and other essential social services, the burden falls disproportionately on women to compensate for their non-availability. Statistics show that women and girls comprise nearly 90% of caregivers.
3. We are also concerned by the impact of negative cultural norms, gender roles and stereotypes, that contribute to perpetuate discrimination toward women and girls, and are also at the root of violence against women. Women and girls continue to experience severe violations of their human rights, in particular the right to a quality public education and to quality public health services, including reproductive health. Furthermore, education and health must include a gender perspective.
4. Global funding for HIV/AIDS, including the funding of universally accessible health services, remains woefully inadequate, particularly in the developing world, increasing the burden on women as caregivers. Women and girls living with HIV or affected by AIDS suffer from the social stigma that has developed toward the pandemic. In a quite substantial number of cases they do not have access to appropriate treatment, and must provide care to family members, dropping out from paid employment or from school, with severe consequences for their future life. Here again, the absence of an adequate redistribution of caring activities between women and men is a major problem that affects the possibilities of real quality of life for women.
5. For women and girls the provision of quality public services is fundamental. We know that quality public services are essential to build strong economies and inclusive societies, too. Without them the Millennium Development Goals cannot be reached. Women and girls support, sometimes very much alone, the burden related to transportation of food and water and the giving of care. The ongoing and prognosticated climate changes represent a further challenge to their livelihoods since their impacts influence sectors that are traditionally associated with women. Women play a crucial role in the defence of public education and health services, eroded by privatisation during the last 20 years, and they have paid a heavy price for those activities that are aimed at improving the welfare of the entire society. The participation of men has been always a very positive aspect of these civil society initiatives and needs to be welcomed and increased.
6. We also draw attention to the persistent under-valuing of women's work, predicated on the notion that a woman's primary role is home-based - caring for her family and tending to household chores. We urge governments to implement International Labour Organization Conventions 100 on Equal Remuneration (1951), and 111 on Discrimination (1958).

7. The world is facing the first financial crisis of the twenty-first century. Not only financial but also the provision of food and the environment are in crisis. Public services could also be considered to be in crisis. The gender impact of these crises is being overlooked, causing women and families to fall into deeper poverty. Women are at risk of being forced out of the workplace and 'back home' by the global financial crisis, particularly in rural areas and among minority and excluded groups (women living with AIDS, children, older people, migrant and domestic workers). Labour market and policies promoting decent work, including access to social protection, basic rights and a voice at work for women and men – play key roles in reducing poverty and inequality around the world.

RECOMMENDATIONS

EDUCATION INTERNATIONAL, INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION AND PUBLIC SERVICES INTERNATIONAL, calls on Governments to:

1. Put in place strong legislation for gender equality in order to abolish discrimination of women in the labor market;
2. Create education programmes that raise public awareness, knowledge and skills among men, including young men, on their roles as parents, and on the crucial need to improve the sharing of family responsibilities between men and women;
3. Strengthen and broaden social safety and protection by ensuring access to social security, pensions, unemployment benefits, maternity protection, and quality education and health care for all, and access to public services and measures, which would enable reconciliation of work, family and private life;
4. Increase predictable funding to the infrastructure of public services, such as education, health and social care, utilities and transportation. In particular, vocational education and training is an imperative, especially in the context of the current financial crisis;
5. Develop quality, and affordable child and elder care facilities, and care facilities for other dependent people, including people living with HIV/AIDS;
6. Develop programmes for recruitment and training of men in early childhood education and caregiving occupations;
7. Adopt laws and incentives to encourage equal sharing of parental responsibilities between women and men;
8. Promote provision of public childcare services, including at the workplace, and adopt family-friendly employment schemes, such as adequate parental leave, part-time work and flexible working hours where men are encouraged to share equally with women household and family responsibilities;
9. Take bold and robust measures aimed at achieving equal pay for work of equal or similar value between women and men;
10. Promote gender balance in all financial institutions funded by government; encourage and promote an increase in numbers of women in management;
11. Make provisions available within working conditions to make it easier to balance home and work responsibilities;

- 12.** Revise selection and nomination procedures to remove any direct or indirect discrimination against mothers/fathers;
 - 13.** Recognize the value of ensuring that women not only begin but also complete their primary and secondary education, and of eliminating gender bias in all types of educational materials that enforce and reinforce inequalities between men and women.
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