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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 Catholic Women’s League Australia, Endeavour Forum and JMJ Children’s Fund of Canada, 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*

The Beneficial Role of the Billings Ovulation Method (BOM)

Success in the fight against AIDS depends on gaining the equal cooperation of men and women. However, the online discussion on the United Nations web page indicates that the burden of care giving, when it comes to the issue of HIV/AIDS, falls almost entirely on the shoulders of women — wives, mothers, young girls and grandmothers caring for orphans — particularly on the continent of Africa. The burden is a heavy one when added to the domestic work of caring for a family, which by tradition, is seen as exclusively a woman's role even if she also has a job to support the family financially. This work can absorb all of a woman's time and energy and, in the case of girls, takes them away from school. If she survives her husband, whose care she is expected to provide even when she herself is sick (and often blamed for his sickness) his family rejects her as an added burden. Even though the disease may be contracted also through sharing needles, contamination with body fluids and from infected mother to fetus, yet, it is usually the man who has brought the disease into the home.

If men are to share the care giving burden, there has to be a fundamental change in attitude and in the nature of the relationship between man and wife. This requires education of both men and women in order to raise a woman's status in the family and society, and to strengthen the family unit. A strong family is the basic unit of a healthy society that helps retain sexual activity within the marital bond; empowers women and girls to make informed choices; educates them in a way to help them delay sexual involvement and brings about change in the way men behave. Two valuable tools in such education are the Billings Ovulation Method of natural fertility regulation, a simple, safe and effective, cost-free method of natural fertility regulation developed by Drs. John and Evelyn Billings over 55 years ago (www.woomb.org) and Youth Alive, part of the Education for Life/Behaviour Change Process (BCP), started in Uganda in 1988.

Dr. John Billings told the story of his visit to the household of an African man who listed his possessions as including a pig, a cow, some chickens and a wife. After the couple had learned and applied the BOM, the husband proudly introduced his wife as his partner. Her status had been elevated in his eyes now that she had taken charge of their combined fertility, resulting in a more relaxed sexual intimacy. In a timeless letter on the back of the yellow BOM brochure found on United Nations NGO tables and advertising Dr. Evelyn Billings' best selling book, "The Billings Method", now translated into 22 languages, Dr. John wrote:

"This letter is addressed to each man and woman who together have entered into a loving commitment with each other. It is to draw your attention to modern scientific natural family planning, particularly the Billings Ovulation Method (BOM). The BOM has been the subject of the most comprehensive scientific research to which any method of regulating births has been exposed. It has

* Issued without formal editing.

also proved its efficiency in providing for the achievement of pregnancy and for the spacing of pregnancies by numerous field trials in different countries of the world. It is truly a universal method as it is very simple in its practical application and is able to be understood even by illiterate poor people.” Mother Theresa taught the BOM in India and found it simple to impart to the illiterate who are often more aware of what is happening in their cycle than women who can read. It is able to be used in all different circumstances of a woman’s reproductive life, irrespective of whether her cycles are regular or not, during breast feeding, during the time of the pre-menopause and so on. Being a natural method, it requires no equipment, chemicals or cost to the user, and is acceptable to the people of different cultures and different religions. Even blind women can use the Method.

“A very great advantage of the BOM is that it fosters communication and understanding between the husband and wife, develops co-operation between them and a sharing of the responsibility in this important matter of their children. In all these ways, it enhances their relationship, helping them to grow in love and fidelity to each other. In this way, it helps to protect them against the widespread epidemic of sexually-transmitted diseases, which cause so much infertility and other complications in virtually all the countries of the world. This protection is also afforded against the disease that we call AIDS, against which the only certain protection is the preservation of monogamous sexual relationships. All women should be taught the Billings Ovulation Method, not only for the advantages set out above but because it is important knowledge for a woman. Understanding her own cycle gives her deeper insight into her womanhood and the dignity of being a woman. As well as that, she will quickly learn to detect the development of abnormalities, so that the Method proves to help women preserve gynecological health. Learn the BOM and teach one another.”

This information is adapted in school and community programs, such as TeenSTAR program (www.teenstarprogram.org), which teaches teenagers how to be aware of their patterns of fertility and infertility. Such knowledge has proved to be very effective in enhancing self-esteem and responsible decision-making in the area of sexual behaviour, such as avoiding pre-marital sexual involvement and pregnancy as well as the risk of contracting STDs and HIV/AIDS. It operates in 35 countries on all six continents. Parents and grandparents familiar with the BOM are conducting mother/daughter or father/son fertility and infertility awareness instructions, carrying on the former tradition of the Luo people who, in special fertility rituals, told girls that the mucus secretion they notice between one menstruation and the next is the sign of their health and fertility.

In Nigeria, the Billings Method is rapidly gaining in popularity, using books, DVDs and personal instruction by men and women teaching men and women. It is particularly effective in reducing infidelity and consequent HIV spread during breast feeding. Formerly marital relationships were not allowed at that time but now things have changed as the Billings Method works very well before the menses returns. The method also helps to reduce the spread of HIV by enabling couples to pre-select the sex of their baby with 95% success. This prevents the husband or wife from going outside marriage in a desperate bid to have a baby boy and often ending up with HIV.

In the Youth Alive movement in Africa promoted by JMJ Children's Fund of Canada Inc., the youth are tackling the problem of HIV/AIDS themselves through peer education. They target youths between 15 and 25 years of age (the majority of the population in Malawi and South Africa) through plays and songs that raise an awareness of the beauty and importance of life and the need to make mature decisions so as to live life more fully. Its main objective is to change the traditional cultural practices that have adverse health effects by educating young men and women in sexual matters and promoting mutual respect and responsibility. One example is the taboo on sexual relations during breastfeeding, leading to an acceptance of male adultery during this time. Workshops help to educate and encourage young people to be open and not afraid to use pre-marital abstinence as a feasible way to beat HIV/AIDS. There are now about 200 trained facilitators both boys and girls in Africa who are organizing their own workshops.
