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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 “World 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: review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session and its contribution to shaping a gender perspective in the realization of the Millennium Development Goals

Statement by the National Women’s Council of Catalonia, 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.6/2010/1.



Statement

Towards recognizing women as full members of society

1. “Looking at the world through women’s eyes” was the theme of the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing, which marked a milestone in that women stopped being seen as victims and rather began to be considered as full partners in the search for solutions to the challenges facing the world. While they recognize the many forms of past and present discrimination against women and government commitments to work towards eliminating discrimination, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action also reflect the need to mainstream a gender perspective into all public programmes and policies, in order both to eliminate the barriers to the full participation of women in all spheres and to recognize and value their unique contributions to the social fabric, human welfare and to the development of their communities. Thus, recognizing women as full members of society means moving towards a new concept of citizenship which would reflect the complexity of diverse identities and accommodate various forms of participation, in pursuit of fully democratic societies.

2. The work of the government of the Generalitat of Catalonia through the Institut Català de les Dones (Catalan Women’s Institute) — the body responsible for formulating and proposing guidelines for policy on women — has been in line with that outlook through action founded on the three pillars of participation, recognition of women’s special knowledge, and a cross-cutting approach, with a view to taking into account women’s involvement in all spheres of public life, addressing the discrete effects that all public policies have on women and men and taking measures to ensure that those effects do not give rise to inequalities.

3. The requirement for a cross-cutting approach is embodied in the Four-Year Action and Development Plan for Women’s Policies (2008-2011), which has 561 fully funded activities with specific goals and indicators that have been negotiated with various relevant government agencies responsible for their implementation. To support the implementation of the Plan, researchers from the Institut Català de les Dones have conducted numerous studies to gain a better understanding of women’s actual experience in the various spheres of political activity and have also developed indicators to evaluate policies from women’s perspective. Most notable among these are the Satellite Account of Household Production in Catalonia (published in 2007) and efforts aimed at laying the groundwork for gender-based budgeting.

4. The following specific actions were taken in various relevant spheres of activity: programme to promote time management and work/life balance 2007-2009; strategic plan on time use and management in daily life 2008-2018; programme for persons involved in promoting equal opportunities at the local level 2007-2010. Priority was accorded to activities promoted by women under the rural development programme 2007-2013; gender mainstreaming in the national housing pact 2007-2016; the provision for gender equity under the Act for the improvement of slums, urban areas and cities requiring special attention; and gender mainstreaming as one of the three cross-cutting objectives of the master plan for development cooperation 2007-2010.

5. In 2009, the public hearing was completed on a bill on a new form of citizenship and gender equality (provisional title) to mandate by law cross-cutting activities aimed at promoting women's participation in society as full members.

6. With respect to the pillar of participation, in recent years a diverse range of women's associations and groups have joined the Consell Nacional de Dones de Catalunya, a consultative body on issues relating to the Generalitat government's plan of action on gender policies which in turn is among a number of government participatory bodies, including the security board, the audio-visual board, the Catalan family monitoring centre and the advisory committee on the maternal and child health care and mental, sexual and reproductive health care strategic management plan. The establishment of territorial assemblies has fostered networking throughout Catalonia and the monitoring of activities at the local level, while specialized thematic working groups are focusing on sectoral follow-up. The Institut Català de les Dones has enlisted the assistance of feminist activists and researchers who provided expert opinion in the development of legislation and proposals for action.

7. A key example of the results that can be achieved from the foregoing is the development and enactment of the Act on the right of women to eradicate male chauvinist violence, legislation that sets forth the rights of women to prevention, care, counselling and support and recovery in cases of male chauvinist violence, which is defined as a societal pattern of violence against women, including violence committed outside marriage or in the house.

8. This new Catalan legislation is undoubtedly an outcome of the often invisible work of the women's movement, which has helped to place the focus on the issue of women's right to protection, care and recovery, both from a conceptual point of view and thanks to the key role it has played in the establishment and development of regional services. This experience has led to an in-depth and useful study on the different experiences of women, the features of each group and the development of a gender-sensitive and egalitarian approach to addressing issues. From this has evolved not only a theory on gender-based violence but also a policy review on the circumstances and the tools needed to bring about meaningful positive change.

9. Fifteen years after Beijing, therefore, we can point to many achievements. However, improvements in the actual living conditions of women remain slow and patchy. Laws and plans of action clash with a social situation that often prevents them from being implemented in the form in which they were adopted, while stereotypes and myths that still hold sway in a patriarchal society cause resistance to their implementation and the desire to cling to the old ways.

10. The full participation of women in society requires a comprehensive approach away from piecemeal actions not meaningfully aimed at doing away with an institutional system of discrimination. Gender impact studies and gender-based budgeting are tools that should be used for clearly defined and mandatory goals, and enhancing accountability mechanisms, since they would be of little use, although mandated, if they were not taken to their logical conclusion.

11. With respect to women's participation, while we value the inclusion of women's experiences and knowledge in political institutions, there is no denying that such participation also gives rise to contradictions. On the one hand, because of the limitations inherent in institutional action, which is based on power structures

that reflect social stratification. On the other hand, because the workings of institutions are out of step with the practices of social movements, and the commitment they require may run counter to the inner workings of groups and associations. The proposals are developed in the institutional frameworks outside of the context from which they originated, and there is often scant critical involvement therein at the implementation stage. The pioneering spirit of the feminist movement is reflected in its speeches but there is a gap between those speeches and reality.

12. In that regard, there appears to be an urgent need to initiate a tripartite dialogue — among politicians, experts and active members of women's groups and associations — about these contradictions that would put the pros and cons of the relationship on the table and recognize the perspective of each of the stakeholders, so as to devise a space for institutions to take on board the ideas and proposals of feminist and women's organizations, and afford the latter the opportunity to influence institutional activities through their values and goals.
