



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
3 December 2010

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women

Fifty-fifth session

22 February-4 March 2011

Item 3 (a) 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

Statement submitted by Madre, 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.6/2011/1.

Statement*

I. Introduction

1. The earthquake that devastated Port-au-Prince on 12 January 2010, killing at least 200,000 people, has left 1.5 million people living in internally displaced person (IDP) camps. Overcrowding, lack of privacy and weakened family and community structures, among other things, render women and girls especially vulnerable to rape and other sexual violence. Women and girls live with inadequate shelter, often sleeping on the ground under nothing more than a tarpaulin or blanket, with no means of protection and often with few family members or friends close by. Many girls lost their primary caregivers in the earthquake and are living alone. Additionally, there is no food aid provided to the camps, and the water that has been provided by humanitarian aid organizations causes diarrhoea if ingested and rashes if used to bathe.

2. The earthquake's destruction of Haiti's educational infrastructure has left most internally displaced children unable to access education. Access to education has also been hindered by the multilayered oppressions experienced by the children that reside in the IDP camps, such as lack of food and clean water and ongoing vulnerability to sexual violence. Since the ability to access education is contingent upon the realization of other human rights, the denial of such rights has resulted in further violation of the right to education. The interdependent nature of these rights guarantees that, as long as the aforementioned rights are violated, the right to education cannot be realized.

3. In May, June, July and October of 2010, lawyer delegations from the United States of America¹ travelled to Port-au-Prince and worked with grass-roots Haitian women's organizations, including KOFIVIV (Komisyon Fanm Viktim pou Viktim), documenting the conditions in 22 IDP camps. Members of the delegations interviewed and spoke with individuals and families living in the camps. Conversations with camp residents revealed a clear pattern of human rights violations, including the right to shelter, water, food and education. Camp residents consistently reported that, while their children had attended school before the earthquake, they had been unable to do so since. Even while living under life-threatening conditions, the inaccessibility of education was one of the most urgent concerns expressed by many camp residents.

II. Pre-earthquake access to education

4. Before the 2010 earthquake, Haitian families faced barriers in access to education. According to an article in *The New York Times*, the Government of Haiti allocated only 2 per cent of its gross domestic product to education, leaving the system grossly underfunded and unable to adequately serve the nation's poor population. With the national education system effectively privatized, children's access to education was dependent upon their family's ability to afford tuition at one of the 92 per cent of all Haitian schools that operated entirely without government funding. As a result, the poorest Haitian families spent an average of 15-25 per cent

* Issued without formal editing.

¹ Delegations included representation from Madre, the International Women's Human Rights Clinic at City University of New York School of Law, the Institute for Justice and Democracy in Haiti, the Center for Constitutional Rights and the law firm Morrison and Foerster.

of their annual income per child on education and school fees. Despite its high price, private education was often inadequate; in some private schools, the average class size was 70 students. Often the teachers had little more education than the students, with about one third of teachers having nine years of education. This is indicative of the difficulty of being able to afford to stay in school long enough to be able to then educate others.

III. Post-earthquake access to education

5. The earthquake destroyed much of Haiti's public and private educational infrastructure. Of the thousands of children living in IDP camps, few are able to attend school. A specialist at the Inter-American Development Bank has estimated that rebuilding Haiti's education system will cost at least \$2 billion over the next five years. While some IDP camps have formed makeshift schools, only a few have resources and they serve a small percentage of the camps' children. Reported corruption in the few remaining schools has caused an increase in tuition making the cost of education prohibitive, forcing families to choose between allocating precious resources for education and food, water, medical care and other basic necessities.

A. *Lack of food and water obstructs access to education*

6. Since the earthquake, the inability of children living in IDP camps to access adequate food has significantly compromised their ability to attend and meaningfully participate in school. In March, children's access to food was further restricted when the Government of Haiti halted food distribution in the camps because of concerns that outside food distribution would harm the Haitian economy in the long-term. President Rene Preval said that the priority should be in creating employment instead. However, the current lack of employment opportunities has left camp residents at a greater risk of malnutrition. Many children devote their time to scavenging for re-sellable items or finding odd jobs to help support their families.

7. The lack of access to clean water also is a barrier to children to attend school. Since water in the IDP camps is unsafe for drinking and bathing, many families must purchase cooking and drinking water. Oftentimes, camp residents are forced to walk several miles or wait in long lines to access clean water. The cost of safe drinking water leaves most families in IDP camps without enough money to send their children to the few schools available.

8. In order for children to succeed in education they must be provided with proper food and nutrition. A study provided by the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* showed that children who are "nutritionally at risk" (the children in the focus group who did not eat breakfast in the morning) exhibited slower stimulus discrimination, increased errors and slower memory recall. Therefore, it is crucial that the Government of Haiti and donor States prioritize creating temporary schools coupled with proper nutritional programmes in IDP camps.

B. *Lack of security obstructs access to education*

9. Since January 2010, the grass-roots women's group KOFAVIV has tracked at least 300 rapes of women and girls in just 22 of the hundreds of camps in Port-au-Prince. Fearing for their safety prevents children from being able to walk alone to school, which now can be extremely far from their camp. Many of the camps do not have lighting or security, and predators can easily hide in the darkness. Children as

young as five years old have been raped while walking alone, and parents have reported being afraid of letting their children go to school without proper and safe transportation. Additionally, many children lost their parents during the earthquake, leaving them vulnerable to prostitution or domestic servitude. Many orphaned children have become “restaveks”, or children forced into domestic slavery due to their poverty and vulnerability. It is estimated that 80 per cent of the “restaveks” in Haiti are girls.

10. Therefore, security and lighting must be implemented in the IDP camps and safe passageways and transportation be made available to children commuting to school.

IV. Recommendations

11. In order for Haitian children to be able to return to school the Government of Haiti and donor States must prioritize the following:

(a) In the short term, temporary schools must be erected to replace those whose structure was damaged or destroyed in the earthquake. The schools that are still functioning must be rid of the corruption that has caused the pricing out of students that attended pre-earthquake. Schools must provide children with nutrition programmes consisting of both food and clean water. Additionally, safe transportation and passageways must be implemented so children can safely commute to and from school;

(b) Long-term goals include rebuilding the schools that were destroyed in the earthquake. Making the schools cost free, while providing a quality education to all children must be a priority. Additionally, the Government must set standards of teacher quality and provide incentives to recruit and retain trained teachers.
