



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
4 December 2012

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women

Fifty-seventh session

4-15 March 2013

Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the 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 Al-Hakim Foundation, 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.



Statement

[Original: Arabic]

The fifty-seventh session of the Commission on the Status of Women is being held this year to discuss a theme that is of the utmost importance: the elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls. The importance of this issue arises from the fact that the phenomenon of violence against women extends to all societies without exception, and is spreading at alarming rates. This situation calls for the combining of all efforts at the international level to endeavour to eliminate the phenomenon.

We at the Al-Hakim Foundation believe firmly that the current session of the Commission on the Status of Women is to be regarded as a great opportunity for women's voices to be heard at the local, national and international levels. We reaffirm on this occasion the importance of participation by women in the process of discussion and decision-making in matters relevant to them, and the necessity of providing all forms of international support to empower women, at all levels.

On this occasion, while we appreciate the efforts of the United Nations and all the Member States to empower women, enable them to enjoy their rights and rescue them from oppression, we should like to reiterate the importance of continuing to create strong, effective partnerships between local governments and civil society in pursuit of progress in this domain. Action to strengthen the role of civil society organizations and women's networks will contribute to the task of enabling women to participate fully in all areas of life at all levels, and will serve to strengthen women and create communities that are more stable and more equitable, thereby fostering the attainment of internationally agreed development goals and improving the quality of life of women, men, families and local communities.

The Al-Hakim Foundation is regarded as a major civil society organization in Iraq. Through its various activities in the domain of women's affairs there, it strives constantly to educate Iraqi women, uphold their rights, and provide them with appropriate opportunities at all levels. It also offers numerous programmes aimed at providing material support for women from the poorer social groups, including widows in particular, who constitute a sizable category in Iraqi society. Through its programmes, the Foundation also seeks to help Iraqi women deal with a variety of challenges, and one of the most serious challenges is the phenomenon of violence and domestic violence.

Violence against women has become a serious global phenomenon affecting every society on earth, including our own Iraqi society. It is a phenomenon that is condemned by all the monotheistic religions, all laws, and the living human conscience.

Ever since 25 December 2008, when the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, launched an international campaign to combat violence against women, the Al-Hakim Foundation has undertaken numerous actions aimed at heightening popular awareness in an effort to counter that phenomenon in Iraq.

The Foundation has adopted the "Islamic day of anti-violence against women" initiative that was launched by the late Iraqi leader, Mr. Abdul Aziz al-Hakim, in January 2009, because we believe that it is an important fundamental step in support of Iraqi, regional and international efforts in that connection, and because, in the

context of that initiative, the work of opposing violence against women is deemed to be a religious duty as well as a humanitarian issue. We believe that action to support the initiative and turn it to account will undercut the holders of extremist views and those who commit violence in the name of religion. Accordingly, we urge all relevant international organizations to support it.

This initiative has become an annual event featuring scientific, cultural and media activities that have emphasized activation of the relevant moral factors in religion and the enlistment of religious and tribal leaders in the work of eliminating the phenomenon of violence against women. As a result, much light has been shed on that phenomenon, which affects women in all societies, and many solutions and approaches inspired from the true Islamic religion have emerged after extensive interaction with religious figures and social categories in Iraq.

The Al-Hakim Foundation believes that unrestricted access by women and girls to education at all levels is the fundamental precondition for the empowerment of women. Accordingly, since 2003 the Foundation has been sponsoring, through its schools and educational institutions, a large-scale educational operation that has made educational opportunities available to thousands of Iraqi women, from the primary level to the post-secondary level. The Foundation has also organized literacy courses in various regions of the country.

We strongly emphasize that it is essential for all Governments to support and encourage programmes aimed at heightening awareness of violence against women. We also call upon Governments to enact appropriate legislation and to take the necessary preventive and punitive measures to eradicate all forms of violence against women and the exploitation of women in prostitution and human trafficking, and to establish monitoring mechanisms to ensure that such legislation is rigorously enforced.

We should also like to emphasize our concern with women who have lost their breadwinner, including widows, divorced women and women who need special care. It is essential to enact appropriate laws and statutory measures, provide budget allocations, and prepare suitable plans to lighten the burdens borne by women in this category, and to endeavour to reduce unemployment rates among women by providing jobs that will enable them to lead lives of dignity.

We call upon the United Nations to urge Member States to establish social welfare institutions that will not merely provide material support, but will develop into centres for the building, fostering and development of women's energies and capacities, enabling them to take advantage of opportunities in administering community affairs. We also call upon the Organization to encourage Member States to ensure that women have adequate opportunities to occupy various leadership posts, political, civil or social, that are commensurate with the situation and circumstances of individual women, so that every woman has an opportunity to fill such a post without discrimination.

In conclusion, we wish to reiterate that it is essential to devote greater attention to rural women, who are likely to be at greater risk of violence and exclusion and less likely to be aware of their rights and entitlements than women living in urban areas. Particular attention and monitoring are called for in order to ensure that rural women obtain their full rights in the areas of education, health care and economic opportunity.