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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 Anglican Consultative Council, Association of Presbyterian Women of Aotearoa (New Zealand), Church Women United, Presbyterian Church USA, Society of Catholic Medical Missionaries, United Church of Christ Board for World Ministries, United Methodist Church General Board of Global Ministries, World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women, World Student Christian Federation and World Young Women’s Christian Association, 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.



Statement

Ecumenical Women is a coalition of Christian non-governmental organizations. We oppose violence against women and girls in any form, which includes physical, economic, sexual or psychological acts. Violence happens in stable and in conflict situations and in public and private spheres, affects the mental health and wellbeing of families and has economic, social and political costs for States.

We uphold women and girls as equal partners with men and boys. We recognize our responsibility and our capacity to prevent violence through education and improving the socioeconomic welfare of families and individuals. We welcome and care for victims, offer them safe and welcoming communities, provide support programmes and counselling, meet basic needs, report abuse and violence and work within communities to advocate for change.

We respectfully submit three issues with our recommendations to effectively address violence against women and girls:

Cultural, structural and economic violence are underlying factors that must be addressed. Ecumenical Women recognizes that underlying all forms of violence are cultural, structural and economic root causes. Structural imbalances demean and diminish the full dignity of women and girls and increase gender discrimination and the risk of violence directed against them.

Cultural values and practices determine the roles of women and men in society and the degrees of acceptance of discrimination, subservience and superiority. Acceptance of discrimination in some cultures may mean that it is not openly recognized. Women and girls also fall victim to culturally acceptable traditional practices that violate their human rights. Societies in many countries sow the seeds of violence against women and girls by portraying them as objects and sexual commodities, by downplaying their value, by glorifying a culture of violence in general and by failing to report incidents of violence against women and girls.

The cultural acceptance of discrimination leads to structural discrimination, whereby a bias against women and girls exists within basic social structures. A lack of representation in leadership and governance means that women cannot effectively represent themselves and their needs. Many Governments adopt national legislation to end violence against women and girls, but fail to implement it. We recognize such implementation to be especially important when violent acts occur in private. States must work actively to ensure that law enforcement and judicial systems prevent and punish violence against women and girls.

Economic discrimination prevents women from contributing fully as economic agents. Although they contribute skills and economic output to their families and communities, they are often not acknowledged for their contributions and are hindered from participating in local, regional and international economies. In many societies, women are either unpaid or receive unequal pay for equal work compared with men. Women's lack of financial stability and their financial dependence on men affect their ability to provide for their families and make them vulnerable to violence. This economic violence often puts women at risk of forms of physical violence including, but not limited to, domestic violence, human trafficking, rape and other forms of violence.

Education is a vital part of the change process, especially societal change. Education must incorporate men and boys alongside women and girls.

Education for all members of society is fundamental in preventing violence. This includes equal access to education for girls and boys, and women and men, and socialization through education about appropriate behaviour between females and males.

While education is considered a basic human right, reports indicate that high rates of illiteracy persist, especially among rural women and girls. Lack of access to education hinders the ability of women and girls to engage in development and income-generating activities for their families and is a form of violence against women and girls.

Education is a key factor for learning about the human rights of each individual — rights which call for respect, equal treatment and dignity. It is important to educate women on their rights, so that they may be empowered to speak out for themselves. We especially recognize that violence against women and girls is often considered a “women’s issue”, but is in fact a societal issue. In order to tackle the roots of gender-based violence, all sectors of society must work together.

We must pay particular attention to the needs of rural and minority populations and improve their access to resources and services.

Rural and minority populations within States often experience particular difficulties in addressing violence due to their geographical and relational isolation from positions and centres of power. This affects their ability to access resources and services, such as education and information.

The needs of rural and minority populations are often forgotten or ignored by those in power, and in worst-case scenarios the powerful exploit members of rural and minority populations. Minority and geographically remote populations are often removed from centres where resources and services are found, such as schools, community centres, shelters, clinics, hospitals, police departments, courts and detention centres. Such isolation may result in alienation and a willingness to turn to violence. It may also leave individuals feeling they will not be caught and thus encourage lawlessness.

Cultural stereotypes may associate certain populations with violence, to the extent that it is considered normal behaviour and thus no intervention is made. Issues of legal jurisdiction, as in the case of some indigenous groups, may prevent law enforcement from being able to prosecute perpetrators.

All people, regardless of their gender, ethnicity or location within a State, have the right to access basic resources and services, such as nutritious food, water, education, transportation, medical care and information. Creating and supporting programmes that support these rights, especially for rural and minority women and girls, will strengthen communities and promote the wellbeing of all people.

Realizing the essential role of Governments in addressing the issues we have identified, we urge Member States to:

1. Partner with civil society in conducting awareness and educational campaigns about gender discrimination and gender-based violence in all its forms.

2. Recognize women's contributions and promote equality for women as active and equal decision makers.
3. Oppose all forms of gender-based stereotyping, discrimination, oppression and violence.
4. Eradicate cultural practices that perpetuate violence against women and girls.
5. Reduce the gaps in political parity and representation and work towards greater inclusion of women in decision-making, leadership and representation in governing structures.
6. Create and enforce laws by which women are guaranteed equal pay for equal work.
7. Increase women's and girls' access to education, especially for rural and minority populations, so that women and girls may contribute their full potential and skills in their communities, have increased confidence and be assisted to better face challenges arising from contact with male dominated enterprises.
8. Provide training to police, medical staff, teachers and school administrators and others who may encounter victims of violence to recognize that violence, provide education on local and national laws and make reporting of abuse obligatory.
9. Increase funding for victim support programmes that especially address the needs of rural and minority populations.
10. Work towards education and access to full reproductive health provisions, including contraception, disease prevention and family planning.
11. Eliminate transportation constraints that prevent women in rural areas from accessing basic resources that would enable them to participate in local, regional and international economies.
12. Train law enforcement personnel regarding the prevalence and appropriate serious response to reports of domestic violence, especially within indigenous populations as well as minorities and the poor.
13. Increase access to information, law enforcement and court systems, medicine, food, water, education and other services in rural and isolated areas.
