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Statement submitted by Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, 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

Introduction

Good Shepherd Sisters are present in over 70 countries. The organization is committed to working zealously with women and children, especially those who are trafficked, forced to migrate or oppressed by abject poverty. This commitment has at its very heart the priority theme of the fifty-seventh session of the Commission on the Status of Women, namely the elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls. Trafficking in women and girls, migration and poverty are some of the most exploitative situations which perpetrate, condone and conceal violence against women and girls. The content of this statement is based on the results of a simple questionnaire sent to 51 field offices. There were 27 responses from 24 countries in the following regions: Africa, Asia-Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, Europe and North America.

The questions focused on gaining a better understanding of:

- (a) Type of violence addressed and services provided;
- (b) Main challenges;
- (c) Innovative practices.

(a) Type of violence addressed and services provided

The following types of violence were addressed: domestic violence (100 per cent), sexual violence (81 per cent), human trafficking (63 per cent), teenage pregnancy (56 per cent), discrimination against migrant women (44 per cent), girl child marriage (19 per cent), female genital mutilation (11 per cent), honour killing (11 per cent) and dowry murder (4 per cent). Other types mentioned frequently were prostitution and gender- and transgender-based acts of violence. Services provided included counselling (93 per cent), education (89 per cent), shelter (85 per cent), skills training (85 per cent), medical (56 per cent) and legal (56 per cent). In just this small sampling of a small organization, we see that the lives of 12,702 women and girls have been marred by multiple types of violence and that these women and girls avail of services when they are offered.

(b) Main challenges

Respondents reported three distinct factors that both service providers and victims/survivors faced in reversing the trend of violence against women and girls: lack of resources; non-enforcement of the law; and normalization of violence against women and girls.

The resources lacking included not only funding but also professional personnel, referral services and education and training programmes. Where there is reluctance on the part of the Government to address violence against women and girls through services and funding, our organization provides alternatives: shelter coupled with referral to medical and legal services, as required, and economic empowerment through skills training coupled with counselling and payment of school fees, when it is possible to upgrade the educational level. Approximately half of the centres providing services rely entirely on the beneficence of donors and volunteers to make the services possible. The other half receive Government funds,

with the numbers skewed in favour of the more developed regions. In addition, many indicated that while funds from the Government were helpful, they were not sufficient and therefore needed to be supplemented with funds from other sources.

Non-enforcement of the law to prevent and punish violence against women and girls was the second most recurring challenge reported. Of the 24 countries, 23 indicated the existence of such laws while 7 reported that the laws provided inadequate protection or were not implemented or enforced.

The normalization of violence against women and girls is a most disturbing challenge. All respondents reported providing services to deal with domestic violence. The literature on violence notes that perpetrators of violence against women are most often intimate partners. This is verified in the provision of services to address domestic violence issues and is further elaborated in comments that in some cultures it was not uncommon for physical or even sexual violence to be committed against a woman or girl as punishment for a crime as defined by the perpetrator. To make matters worse, the reality experienced by our service personnel is that many women and girls suffering from acts of violence accept this treatment either owing to cultural or societal pressure or simply out of a lack of knowledge of their right to live free of such violence.

(c) Innovative practices

A representative sample of innovative practices from Colombia, Ethiopia, India and Ireland is outlined here.

In Ethiopia, women and girls relocating from urban to rural areas are provided with funds to purchase a cell phone. This enables them to have access to supportive relationships and receive guidance and counselling from a distance. Having a network of knowledgeable and supportive guidance counsellors at hand decreases the likelihood of falling victim to repeated violence.

The respondent from India cited examples of communities that have created “legal cells” for women. These are community-based services that address conflict, mostly domestic violence cases. Following the registration of a case, a legal team consisting of professional advocates, case workers and staff explores solutions for each case while being cognizant of cultural and familial ties. Such initiatives serve as a source of empowerment for the individual and the community.

Successful prevention will always be the best practice. Among the centres, 89 per cent provide some form of preventive service. Another good practice comes from Colombia and combines nutrition and education. In order to maintain and increase school attendance rates, the centre provides students who attend school with lunch. The incentive of nutrition encourages many to attend regularly, and the results are positive. The more time girls spend in school, the less likely they are to be exploited.

The respondent from Ireland networked with Men Overcoming Violence, which works to support the safety and well-being of women and their children who are experiencing or have experienced violence/abuse in an intimate relationship. The programme does this by facilitating men in a weekly group process that involves them taking responsibility for their violence and changing their attitudes and behaviour (www.moveireland.ie).

Addressing challenges

Another good practice is the networking of producers and marketers. The producers, enterprising women in Bolivia (Plurinational State of), El Salvador, Indonesia, Kenya, Mexico, Peru, the Philippines, Sri Lanka and Thailand, and produce unique, handmade goods that are marketed by HandCrafting Justice in the United States of America, Sharing Fair Europe and Trading Circle Australia according to fair trade principles. Women and girls are helped to develop business acumen, are afforded economic opportunities, have access to ongoing education and are supported in personal development, including confronting all forms of violence perpetrated against them. Women and girls are empowered to name, discuss and confront the many forms of violence perpetrated against them.

The Good Shepherd International Foundation fundraises for local partners in 38 countries in the global South. The Foundation applies for international grants from public funding agencies, private sponsors and non-governmental organizations.

Conclusions

Education was identified by virtually all respondents as a key component in addressing violence against women and girls. Currently, efforts to eliminate violence against women and girls are undermined by a lack of awareness, harmful cultural practices, the favouring of boys over girls and the prevalence of patriarchal societies. Through the education of both genders, more women and men can come to challenge and even denounce the status quo, which will set the stage for change. The concept of gender equality can be taught to girls and boys at a young age, so that they can grow into women and men who respect each other's human rights and uphold gender equality.

Furthermore, poverty is a driving force leading to violence against women and girls, as well as a hindrance to its eradication. The types of violence listed by respondents can be linked directly to economic factors. For instance, in cultures where girl child marriage is practised, most girls are married for the financial benefit of their families. When girls and young women are trafficked, it is because of poverty. As service providers, we have seen the positive impact of programmes but recognize that remedying violence against women and girls is the primary responsibility of the State.

Recommendations

- **Empower women economically.** Implement International Labour Organization Recommendation No. 202 concerning national floors of social protection, aimed at extending essential health care and basic income security to all.
- **Enforce the law.** Adopt a strong national human rights-based policy of zero tolerance of violence against women and girls, including prosecuting perpetrators.
- Educate men and boys, women and girls to continually challenge prevailing attitudes of violence against women and girls.