



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
7 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 International Federation of Social Workers, 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

The International Federation of Social Workers supports the theme of the session, “Elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls”, because it is totally congruent with its aims. This association is a global federation of social work organizations in 90 countries, representing over 750,000 social workers. The goals are to promote social and economic equality, promote the dignity and worth of peoples, work towards environmental sustainability and strengthen recognition of the importance of human relationships. We promote social strategies that build cohesive societies and remove the seeds of conflict. This commitment coincides with the theme of the fifty-seventh session of the Commission on the Status of Women as well as the Millennium Development Goals and the post-2015 development agenda. Additionally, the Federation supports the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Addressing violence against women is vital for the empowerment of women around the world. Moreover, we consider the prevention and elimination of all forms of violence against women to be a potent element for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

The International Federation of Social Workers supports the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, building on the requirements of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The Platform for Action identified violence against women as one of the 12 critical areas of concern requiring urgent action for achieving the goals of equality, development and peace.

The International Federation of Social Workers also supports the visibility that other major treaties and conventions have brought to the global issue of violence against women, such as the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Social workers around the world work in the areas of policy, programme and practice to eliminate violence against women and girls and promote their educational, physical, economic and social well-being.

Violence

Violence against women can occur at any point in the life cycle. It ranges from infanticide to child sexual abuse, date rape, sexual trafficking, intimate partner violence and elder abuse.

Human rights for all people can only be achieved by recognizing the inherent dignity and worth of every individual. Violence against women is an obstacle to the achievement of the human rights objectives of equality, development and peace, because violence against women both violates and nullifies the benefits for women of their human rights and fundamental freedoms. In all societies, to a greater or lesser degree, women and girls are subjected to physical, sexual and psychological abuse across all income, class, national and cultural lines.

The forms and manifestations of violence against women may differ depending on the specific social, economic, cultural and political context. Violence against women implies not only a violation of women’s rights, but also has consequences for the healthy development of all people.

The International Federation of Social Workers agrees with the General Assembly resolutions (2006-2009) which state that States should work towards eliminating all forms of violence against women. These resolutions are based on the premise that the State is responsible for ensuring that victims of human rights violations have an individual right to “reparation” in the form of restitution (restore the victim to his/her original situation before the violation); compensation (for economic damage); rehabilitation (including medical and psychological care as well as legal and social services); and measures of satisfaction (the verification of the facts and full and public disclosure of the truth). The Federation considers this process of reparation fundamental for the elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women, as the process supports the pursuit of social justice, human rights and social development for women.

Education

In 2010 an estimated 61 million primary school-age children and 71 million children of lower secondary school age were out of school. Girls accounted for more than half of the primary school-age children out of school. For example, in the Arab States 61 per cent of the out-of-school population is female. With limited education women have less opportunity than men to develop abilities to support themselves and their families. For these reasons the International Federation of Social Workers supports the campaign of the United Nations Girls’ Educational Initiative to achieve gender equality in education because, as the campaign states, girls and boys must have equitable educational opportunities. Policymakers and practitioners around the world have an obligation to address gender inequality, as articulated in the Millennium Development Goals and by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

Gender equality has not been achieved in schools because of the multiple cultural, societal and physical barriers that girls face in attending school. Additionally, as the United Nations Girls’ Educational Initiative (2012) states, schools are institutions founded on a dominant male culture. Thus, they can, on purpose or inadvertently, perpetuate societal gender inequalities through power relations within schools, pedagogy, and portrayal of male and female roles in textbook and learning materials.

Gender inequality in education is a form of psychological abuse towards girls, represents a latent form of violence against women and is a violation of article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Violence diminishes women’s and girls’ ability to gain an education, earn a living and participate in public life. Gender inequality in education is an obstacle to the healthy development of individuals (girls, boys, women and men), families, Governments, countries and global society.

Health

Violence against women and girls causes a range of health problems, including poor mental and sexual/reproductive health, physical injuries and death. Conditions frequently thought to be “male” problems such as heart attacks and strokes are currently the two leading killers of women. HIV/AIDS, pregnancy-related conditions and tuberculosis continue to be major killers of women aged 15 to 45 globally.

Violence increases vulnerability to HIV/AIDS because it restricts women's ability to exercise their sexual and reproductive rights. Every day in 2010, about 800 women died from complications of pregnancy and childbirth. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) (2012) is promoting campaigns around the world for the use of contraceptives to reduce maternal mortality. Women around the world often face many barriers in accessing preventive, prenatal and post-natal care. Few services are available for marginalized groups of women such as unmarried women, adolescents, sex workers, intravenous drug users, ethnic minorities and rural women.

The Federation is particularly concerned about the influence of violence against women on their mental health, along with their physical, social, sexual and reproductive health.

Economic empowerment

Women's economic empowerment is a potential solution to preventing violence against women. Globally, 1.4 billion people live in extreme poverty and women represent 70 per cent of the world's poor, most of whom live in developing countries. While poverty affects all households, women bear a disproportionate burden due to the gender division of labour and responsibilities for household welfare. Economic empowerment of women serves to eliminate poverty and achieve the Millennium Development Goals. The Global Poverty Project provides economic and political empowerment by offering microcredit loans to increase women's mobility, ability to make financial decisions and develop political and legal awareness.

The International Federation of Social Workers believes that promoting the economic well-being of women and girls helps to eliminate violence against women and contributes to global social and economic development.

Recommendations

The International Federation of Social Workers makes the following recommendations.

Violence against women and girls should be addressed through collaborative partnerships between Governments, communities and civil society. Advocacy is needed within sovereign States to ratify the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and other United Nations conventions on violence against women.

Since international mandates are often not implemented, even within signatory countries, national laws need to be passed and enforced that promote women's rights and protect them against violence.

The international community should work towards increased education and skills training for women and girls, as well as accessible and enhanced health care.

Social development advocates must be culturally competent when addressing gender inequality and promoting human rights for women around the world.