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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 Virginia Gildersleeve International Fund, 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

Virginia Gildersleeve International Fund, an organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, provides small grants to organizations empowering women and girls in developing countries.

Violence against women and girls, in particular domestic violence, stems from deep-seated traditional roots existent in any country's culture and religion. Analysis of violence demonstrates a domination strategy employed by a man to curb a woman's right to freedom, affecting her dignified and secured survival. Violence affects millions of women from different socioeconomic strata, cuts across cultural and religious barriers and impedes the fundamental human right of women to participate fully in society. The impact of such violence on children must also be taken into account.

Violence and crime are not limited to physical intimidation. They include sexual harassment in the street, the workplace and other public and private places; violence relating to information and communication technology; gendered political violence; trafficking; female foeticide; honour killing; dowry death; partner violence; female genital mutilation; rape; and other acts of coercion. All forms of violence are unacceptable violations of human rights and form an enormous obstacle to gender equality, economic development and true human progress. This is perpetuated by various means, including subtle pressure through the power of ideology, the mechanism of internalized social norms and the system of social sanctions that penalizes non-compliance.

The recognition of violence against women as a human rights violation was first articulated in the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, adopted in 1993 by the World Conference on Human Rights. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, adopted in 1979, recognized that discrimination was a root cause of violence and that the denial of equal rights reinforced and perpetuated such violence.

To curb this gross human rights violation and to protect women from domestic violence, the United Nations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and public and private bodies must work relentlessly so that more effective protection of the rights of women is guaranteed under each country's constitution. They must also strive to prevent physical, verbal, emotional, economic and sexual abuse by husbands, live-in partners, relatives and other actors. The mission of international organizations must include increasing awareness and understanding of what constitutes violence and what relevant actions and structured policies of advocacy can be adopted by communities, individuals, federations and Governments at large to ensure a safer world for women.

We therefore recommend the following actions:

(a) More effective educational strategies, both formal and non-formal, must be formulated as a part of Government policy measures by introducing gender-free curricula for equal development of and respect for both males and females;

(b) Both Governments and NGOs must assume a more active role by lobbying and implementing advocacy measures to prevent, confront and resolve issues, facing challenges rather than resorting to violence;

(c) Governments must combat crimes and make serious efforts to mobilize and challenge the existing social norms and cultural patterns that support undemocratic male supremacy. For example, women are often afraid to report acts of violence against them to the police for fear of being raped or tortured by law enforcement officials;

(d) Intergovernmental organizations must immediately implement legislation to curb the exploitation of and violence against women with disabilities. The United Nations, in conjunction with NGOs, should implement conventions to curb violence and establish respect for all human rights;

(e) Governments should translate information about these rights into minority languages. As noted by our grantee in Tbilisi, many minority populations are not aware of these rights, yet to promote them they must know about them;

(f) Governments should develop systems of cooperation among law enforcement agencies and NGOs as part of taking concrete measures to end violence against women and girls;

(g) Society must ensure the more active participation of NGOs and social workers in the prevention, rescue and rehabilitation of victims of violence;

(h) United Nations directives to all nations should advocate working with parents, teachers, health-care workers and law enforcement bodies to raise their awareness and train them in preventing violence against women and girls;

(i) Governments should request the inclusion of boys and men in special educational classes to discuss the impact of violence on women. Our grantee in Honduras, for example, runs programmes where men take part in training programmes and advisory groups to educate other men about how to curb anger and violence;

(j) The public and private sectors, including Governments and NGOs, need to establish rehabilitation centres for women affected by any form of violence by men;

(k) The United Nations and Governments need to design project plans with funding support to empower women to help become financially self-reliant;

(l) The public and private sectors need to create jobs to ensure that women can earn a living wage that is equal to that paid to their male counterparts. Our grantee in Juba recommends that job counselling focus on bringing women out of low-paid work situations to give them the opportunity to earn better wages to support their families. Strengthening institutional mechanisms and eliminating the negative effects of socioeconomic and cultural practices that promote sexual and gender-based violence should be part of this effort;

(m) The media should support efforts to end violence against women. As noted by our grantee in Bukavu, Democratic Republic of the Congo, the media should be used to broadcast information regarding rape, community outreach, advocacy and family mediation, workshops and meetings with rape victims and with those born of rape;

(n) Governments and society must improve jurisdiction and access to justice, especially in rural areas, and remove social discrimination against victims.