



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
29 November 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 Asia Pacific Women’s Watch, 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

Asia Pacific Women's Watch is a regional network representing voices from across the five subregions of Asia and the Pacific. Asia Pacific Women's Watch welcomes the priority theme for the fifty-seventh session of the Commission on the Status of Women, "Elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls".

Asia Pacific Women's Watch recognizes that the priority theme is a prerequisite for the realization of the Beijing Platform for Action and the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. It also recognizes the opportunity to address situations specific to women in conflict and war-affected areas in accordance with Security Council resolution 1325 (2000).

The Asia-Pacific Region is home to 60 per cent of the world's population, a significant proportion of whom are women. The region has cultures that privilege the male, which creates situations where violence against women is exacerbated. It is also a region which sees a multitude of interventions adopted by States and non-governmental organizations to employ effective measures to prevent violence against women and girls.

Violence against women is defined in the 1993 Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, which recognizes that violence against women includes physical, sexual or psychological acts perpetrated by another, in public or private spaces. Violence against women can be perpetrated by assailants of any gender, family status or the State. The Beijing Platform for Action expands this to include "violations of the rights of women in situations of armed conflict, in particular murder, systematic rape, sexual slavery and forced pregnancy", as well as "forced sterilization and forced abortion, coercive/forced use of contraceptives, female infanticide and prenatal sex selection". This recognizes the particular vulnerabilities of women from minority communities, indigenous women, refugee and displaced women, migrants, women in poverty, destitute women, women in institutions, women with disabilities, elderly women, and women in situations of armed conflict, foreign occupation, wars of aggression, and terrorism. Other forms of violence not included in the above are date rape, so-called "honour" crimes and violence in cyberspace. These forms of violence are pervasive and persistent across the countries in Asia and the Pacific.

Violence against women is a generic problem across the Asia-Pacific and deeply rooted in patriarchy. Violence against women and girls potentially reinforces a range of known determinants of gender inequality, social isolation, economic disadvantage and overall poor health, including poor mental health. Violence diminishes the ability to gain an education, earn a living and participate in public life. Violence severely restricts women's ability to exercise their sexual and reproductive rights, with grave consequences for sexual and reproductive health as well as increasing the risk of contracting HIV.

For countries in conflict and post-conflict situations, violence against women is a severe impediment to women's full enjoyment of their human rights and fundamental freedoms. Women face direct threats to their lives, bodies, dignity and

security when they face sexual violence and exploitation in the context of a breakdown of law and order and when they are forcibly displaced. They are denied access to basic services, lose opportunities to engage in paid work and are not included in peacebuilding processes.

Women are particularly vulnerable to violence after a disaster. The region is increasingly vulnerable to disasters such as floods, fires, earthquakes, hurricanes, droughts and tsunamis. Women comprise 50 per cent of the displaced population and bear the brunt of violence and harm to sexual and reproductive health, including rape, intimidation, early and forced marriages, kidnapping and miscarriages.

There has been an alarming increase in intimate partner violence across the region. Women in such situations face repeated physical, sexual and psychological violence.

Indigenous and rural women experience various forms of violence within their own communities and societies, often being marginalized from economic development programmes and processes at local and national levels. Women also face violence caused by colonization, militarization, ecological destruction and the practices of extractive industries; indigenous women are often invisible in many legal systems and suffer from ongoing intergenerational trauma.

Migrant and refugee women face oppression, violence and discrimination in their new communities and societies where harmful traditional, cultural and religious beliefs continue to prevail. Migrant women workers face violations such as forced labour, seizure of documents, physical, mental and sexual harassment, denial of weekly rest days, non-payment of agreed wages and trafficking. Low remuneration, heavy workloads, long working hours, poor career development opportunities and, in some countries, lack of freedom of movement are commonplace. Jobs tend to be in the low-wage sector, such as domestic work or factory employment. Deaths of migrant workers abroad are categorized as accidents, homicides or suicides. Trafficking of women is a major concern, resulting in severe exploitation, deception, coercion and brutality. Trafficked women are particularly vulnerable to exploitation and violence due to their inability to speak the local language and irregular status in a foreign country.

Women in the workforce face structural violence when denied equal pay and benefits. Many do not receive formally recognized entitlements.

Women and girls with disabilities are the group at highest risk of gender-based violence across the region, and are the least represented. Women with disabilities are more likely to suffer from multiple levels and aspects of violence than other women and the number of disabled women who experience intimate partner violence is considerably higher.

Societies across the region are being subjected to religious extremism and “fundamentalism”; women face an increasing incidence of violence when diversity is not tolerated. Honour killings in most instances go unreported; murders are committed within the context of shame, property disputes and inheritance rights of women. Female genital mutilation in the name of religion and culture remains a key challenge. Some Governments resort to manipulating the right to cultural and religious diversity as a pretext for violating human rights, including the rights guaranteed to women and girls, people living with HIV/AIDS and persons with diverse sexual orientations. Homosexuality is criminalized or treated as a punishable offence in a number of countries.

As we move towards constructing the post-2015 development agenda, it is an optimal time to review, analyse and re-strategize all efforts to respond to all forms of violence against women in all situations.

Asia Pacific Women's Watch calls on Governments to strengthen political will and invest and allocate funds for women's and girl's access to health and education and their participation in political and public life.

Asia Pacific Women's Watch calls on Governments to maintain accountability and transparency in State reconstruction by including women's needs and priorities, human rights, including sexual and reproductive health rights, access to justice, and representation and participation in peace processes.

Asia Pacific Women's Watch calls on Governments to ensure the implementation of Security Council resolutions on women peace and security and to recognize that the needs and priorities of women in conflict and post-conflict situations must be comprehensively addressed.

Asia Pacific Women's Watch urges Governments and aid agencies confronting disaster and emergency situations to ensure provision of gender-responsive relief strategies, to take strong preventive measures and to bring necessary services to women and girls, including sexual and reproductive health services, and to work to eliminate violence against women. Longer-term measures are essential to mobilize women and girls and enable them to acquire the confidence and ability to make choices for their health and sexual and reproductive rights and to prevent violence.

Asia Pacific Women's Watch calls on Governments to acknowledge the importance of integrating and mainstreaming labour migration issues in national employment, gender equality, labour market and development policies, as they are key to maximizing opportunities and minimizing risks for migrant workers in both origin and destination countries. Governments should also ensure that migration policies and measures in countries of origin and destination are gender responsive and ensure greater gender equality and benefits for women and development.

Asia Pacific Women's Watch calls on Governments to provide confidential and secure domestic and sexual violence interventions that meet the needs of a diversity of women, who are currently underserved by existing services. This includes the provision of specialist services where these are required, such as safe houses/women's refuges that provide better clinical care, especially for women who require greater support, such as disabled women.

Asia Pacific Women's Watch calls on Governments to strengthen health policies and decrees related to violence against women/gender-based violence that are fundamental for initiating and sustaining health-sector responses, that are holistic and integrated, and that include community-level awareness-raising programmes conducted in a rights-based, gender-sensitive and culturally sensitive manner; to integrate the issue of gender-based violence into the medical curricula; and to provide sexual and reproductive health and rights education in schools as a means of primary prevention.

Asia Pacific Women's Watch recommends developing resource pools of experts at the national and international levels for capacity-building.