



## **Economic and Social Council**

Distr.: General  
29 November 2012

Original: English

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### **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 Business and Professional Women, 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 Business and Professional Women is an organization founded on the vision of achieving workplace equality, the right to vote, and equal pay and dedicated to the economic advancement of women. It seeks to develop women's professional and leadership potential at all levels, determined that its efforts will lead to the equal participation of women and men in power and decision-making roles. The Federation welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the discussion on violence against women and girls by concentrating in this statement on the concept of economic violence, a concept mentioned in passing but not elaborated on in many of the reports on the prevention of violence against women and girls considered at the expert group meeting held in Bangkok from 17 to 20 September 2012.

The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (see General Assembly resolution 48/104, article I) defines violence against women and girls as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women [or girls], including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life". It is caused by, and in turn causes, gender inequality and discrimination and constitutes a human rights violation.

This definition is not limited to physical abuse, but comprehends both overt and covert behaviour that does violence to women and girls in the workplace and to their ability to achieve equality with men in economic power and decision-making. Discriminatory behaviour includes, inter alia, unequal remuneration for work done by women that is equal in value to that done by men; unpaid work; limited access to funds and credit; lagging advancement and promotion; limited access to decision-making, both financial and professional; and sexual harassment. It constitutes an assault on the economic independence and development of women and girls and has consequences in terms of health, both physical and mental, and general social well-being.

### Employment inequities

Currently, the employment rate for women in Europe lags behind that for men. In the European Union in 2011, according to the European Commission, the employment rate for men stood at 70.1 per cent, compared with 58.5 per cent for women, which nevertheless constitutes a 4.2-percentage-point improvement for women during the years 2001 to 2011. Within that statistic, however, the incidence of part-time work differs significantly between men and women. Almost one third (32.1 per cent) of women employed in the European Union worked on a part-time basis in 2011, compared with 9.0 per cent of men. The employment rate for mothers is 12.1 per cent lower than that for women without children, and the employment rate for fathers is 8.7 per cent higher than that for men without children. However, the World Economic Forum finds that more women are employed around the world than ever before and that women now make up 52 per cent of workers in the United States of America.

Education is a significant factor in employment, standing at 83.7 per cent for those with a tertiary education, 73.2 per cent for those with an upper secondary education and 53.5 per cent for those with a primary or lower secondary education.

However, an advanced education is no guarantee of equality of earning power. The difference in pay between women and men is marked. In 2009, women earned on average 17 per cent less in gross wages per hour than men in the European Union and the euro area. In the United States, median weekly earnings in 2010, according to the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, were \$669 for women and \$824 for men, reflecting a nearly 20 per cent gap in wages. The gap was larger between professional men and women, with women earning a median weekly salary of \$923, compared with men's median weekly salary of \$1,256. According to the National Committee on Pay Equity, women in the United States still make 78 cents for every dollar a man earns, an inequity that is repeated the world over. The International Labour Organization (ILO) reports that in a majority of countries, women's wages represent between 70 and 90 per cent of men's wages, with even lower ratios in some Asian and Latin American countries.

Furthermore, female employees still tend to be concentrated in entry- or mid-level positions, and the biggest barrier to female leadership seems to be a male-dominated, patriarchal and hierarchical corporate culture and a lack of mentors. In addition, cultural norms that discriminate against women, stereotypes regarding women's roles and what constitutes acceptable female behaviour, and low expectations for women in terms of earning capacity all contribute to the discrepancies.

In surveys of human resources executives at 600 companies across 16 industries and 20 countries, the World Economic Forum *Corporate Gender Gap Report* found that when it comes to political empowerment and economic participation, women have not made much progress. While advancement opportunities are available for both sexes, women often fail to advance as quickly as men. The United States National Center for Education Statistics reports that women work on average three years longer than men as teachers before promotion to the position of principal.

Sexual harassment is a constant threat in many workplaces, but statistics are hard to come by, in part because there is no universal definition of what constitutes such behaviour. Women and men have differing perceptions of the problem, and victims of sexual harassment are often reluctant to report their experiences for fear of blame and retaliation, shame or distrust of the complaint process. In the report of the Secretary-General entitled "In-depth study on all forms of violence against women" (July 2006), the discussion of the problem is limited to a single paragraph. The report notes that: "The main source of information on sexual harassment in the workplace in most countries is the ministry of labour or the national office that processes complaints against employers. In countries where there is no legislation to address sexual harassment, there are virtually no records on its extent."

### **Consequences**

The discrepancies that have been pointed out in the employment of women and men have wide consequences. The stress of poor pay, lack of economic opportunity and advancement, cultural stereotypes that place women in inferior positions, the obstacles preventing women from assuming powerful and decision-making positions, the lack of support for adequate maternal care and maternity leave, the lack of child care and the threat of sexual harassment in the workplace increase the amount of stress placed on women and lead to health problems, both physical and

mental, in turn creating additional burdens for individuals, communities and, eventually, nations. The World Economic Forum report shows that the gender gap is costing companies' profits and a nation's economic growth. It estimates that the United States gross domestic product (GDP) could be increased by 9 per cent if the gender employment and pay gaps were closed. In other countries the inequities are even more glaring, and the impact of closing these gaps on GDP would be even more considerable. Clearly, any measures that would empower women, close the gaps and foster equality between men and women would be financially advantageous. Equality between women and men is sound business sense as well as good human rights policy.

### **Best practices to create an empowering and supportive work environment**

Women need access to information, resources, education, training, markets, technical assistance and labour organizations. They need equal, secure access to capital and to credit. And they need social status in order to be able to participate equally with men in decision-making.

The achievement of such access and rights is a complex process that must involve structural changes in many areas in order to reduce the inequalities that have been pointed out. These must include: (a) changing patriarchal cultures and social structures to establish the concept of the equality of men and women; (b) changing the stereotypes of women as subservient sex objects; (c) involving men and boys in dialogues concerning the empowerment of women; (d) stressing that the economic independence of women is a condition for the equality of women and men; (e) involving the community in supporting education for women; (f) providing accessible and affordable health and social services; and (g) ensuring, through popular campaigns and broad media coverage, the adoption of national mechanisms designed to develop the leadership potential of women and enhance their economic status.

With regard to resolving the inequities of women's employment in corporations and businesses, one of the best ways of preventing the kind of discrimination and exploitation that women regularly suffer is for companies to adopt "Women's Empowerment Principles: Equality Means Business", a set of seven steps, developed by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and the Global Compact, that businesses and other sectors can undertake to empower women and advance their status. The Principles include these steps: (a) leadership and gender equality; (b) equal opportunity, inclusion and non-discrimination; (c) health, safety and freedom from violence; (d) education and training; (e) enterprise development, supply chain and marketing practices; (f) community leadership and engagement; and (g) transparency, measuring and reporting.

The Principles are formulated as follows:

1. Establish high-level corporate leadership for gender equality.
2. Treat all women and men fairly at work — respect and support human rights and non-discrimination.
3. Ensure the health, safety and well-being of all women and men workers.
4. Promote education, training and professional development for women.

5. Implement enterprise development, supply chain and marketing practices that empower women.
6. Promote equality through community initiative and advocacy.
7. Measure and publicly report on progress to achieve gender equality.

The International Federation of Business and Professional Women has made the formulation and adoption of the Women's Empowerment Principles the cornerstone of its activities over the past few years, helping to shape their provisions with its advocacy at the United Nations, widely disseminating information on the initiative, and enlisting corporations and businesses to adopt the Principles to inform their workplace policies. The organization has also given wide publicity to the gender pay gap by establishing, through internationally recognized campaigns, an Equal Pay Day.

### **General recommendations**

On the basis of existing studies and a survey conducted by the International Federation of Business and Professional Women among its affiliates in almost 100 countries, we recommend the following practices to ensure that women do not suffer the economic violence that follows from gender inequality and discrimination against women in the workplace:

- (a) Mobilizing communities to raise awareness of discrimination, pinpoint harmful cultural and social behaviours, and develop alternative models;
- (b) Reaching out to men and boys to change social and cultural beliefs and attitudes that permit exploitative behaviour;
- (c) Stressing the economic independence of women as a condition for equality between women and men throughout their lives, and emphasizing that it must include, among other characteristics, equal employment, equal pay, pension, poverty alleviation strategies, accessible and affordable care, social and health services, generous maternity leave benefits and child care;
- (d) Creating economic opportunities for women and publicizing them;
- (e) Informing women of their rights through educational campaigns and on-the-job training and development;
- (f) Educating women about negotiating and leadership skills;
- (g) Guaranteeing the freedom to organize unions and associations;
- (h) Closing the gender pay gap through multi-strategy interventions that promote equality between women and men;
- (i) Adopting and implementing the Women's Empowerment Principles;
- (j) Widely utilizing the media and social networks to publicize inequalities in employment and pay;
- (k) Promoting appropriate legislation within State parties in order to effect the change in behaviour that we need.

The time to act is now!