



## **Economic and Social Council**

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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 Black Sea Civil Society Solidarity Association, 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**

The United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993) states that “violence against women is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men and to the prevention of the full advancement of women, and that violence against women is one of the crucial social mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position compared with men”.

### **The issue of violence**

Violence against women is an obstacle to the achievement of the objectives of equality, development and peace. Violence against women both violates and impairs or nullifies the enjoyment by women of their human rights and fundamental freedoms.

An environment that maintains world peace and promotes and protects human rights, democracy and the peaceful settlement of disputes, in accordance with the principles of refraining from the threat or use of force against territorial integrity or political independence and of respect for sovereignty as set forth in the Charter of the United Nations, is an important factor for the advancement of women.

Women have the right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. The enjoyment of this right is vital to their life and well-being and their ability to participate in all areas of public and private life.

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In today’s world, more than 1 billion people, the great majority of whom are women, live in unacceptable conditions of poverty, mostly in the developing countries. Poverty has various causes, including structural ones. Poverty is a complex, multidimensional problem, with origins in both the national and the international domains.

Unequal gender relations are a key factor underpinning women’s inability to protect themselves from sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS, as well as influencing how HIV infection and AIDS affect women’s lives. They are also a root cause of violence against women. More specifically, physical violence, the threat of physical violence, and sexual violence and coercion are all likely to be important factors associated with HIV transmission for women of all ages and in a range of settings.

There are considerable differences in women’s and men’s access to, and opportunities to exert power over, economic structures in their societies. In most parts of the world, women are virtually absent from or are poorly represented in economic decision-making, including the formulation of financial, monetary, commercial and other economic policies, as well as tax systems and rules governing pay.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that everyone has the right to take part in the Government of his or her country. The empowerment and autonomy of women and the improvement of women's social, economic and political status are essential for the achievement of both transparent and accountable government and administration and sustainable development in all areas of life.

A recent study reviewed original research on the intersection between violence committed against women by intimate partners and risk for HIV infection, and highlighted opportunities for new research and programme development. Seventy-one articles, presenting original, peer-reviewed research conducted among females aged 12 and older in heterosexual relationships over the past decade (1998-2007), were reviewed. Studies were eligible for inclusion if they addressed intimate partner violence against women and HIV/AIDS as mutual risk factors. The prevalence of intimate partner violence and HIV infection among women varies globally, but females remain at elevated risk for both intimate partner violence and sexually transmitted/HIV infection, independently and concurrently. Comparisons between sero-negative and sero-positive women varied by geographic region; African HIV-positive women reported higher rates of victimization, while findings were inconsistent for HIV-positive women in the United States of America. Studies among various populations support the existence of a temporally and biologically complex relationship among HIV risk, lifetime exposure to violence and substance use, which are further complicated by gender and sexual decision-making norms. Sexual risk related to intimate partner violence arises through both male and female behaviour and the physiological consequences of violence affect women throughout their lives. Further physiological and qualitative research is needed on the mechanisms of enhanced transmission; prospective studies are critical to address issues of causality and temporality. Prevention efforts should focus on the reduction of male-perpetrated intimate partner violence and male HIV risk behaviours in intimate partnerships.

Some historians believe that the history of violence against women is tied to the history of women being viewed as property and assigned a gender role according to which they are subservient to men and other women.

The World Health Organization reports that violence against women places an undue burden on health-care services, with women who have suffered violence being more likely to need health services and at higher cost compared with women who have not suffered violence. Several studies have shown a link between maltreatment of women and international violence. These studies show that one of the best predictors of inter- and intra-national violence is the maltreatment of women in the society concerned.

Women are more likely to be victimized by someone with whom they are intimate, which is commonly called "intimate partner violence". The impact of domestic violence in the sphere of violence against women can be understood when one considers the fact that from 40 to 70 per cent of murders of women are committed by their husbands or boyfriends. Studies have shown that violence does not always take the form of physical violence; it can also be psychological and verbal. In unmarried relationships, this is commonly called "dating violence", whereas in the context of marriage it is called "domestic violence". Instances of intimate partner violence tend not to be reported to police, and thus many experts believe that the true magnitude of the problem is hard to determine. Women are

much more likely than men to be murdered by an intimate partner. In 2005 in the United States, 1,181 women were killed by their intimate partners, compared with 329 men. In England and Wales, approximately 100 women are killed by partners or former partners each year, while 21 men were killed in 2010. In 2008 in France, 156 women were killed by their intimate partners, compared with 27 men.

Although this form of violence is often portrayed as an issue in the context of heterosexual relationships, it also occurs in lesbian relationships, daughter-mother relationships, roommate relationships and other domestic relationships involving two women. Violence against women in lesbian relationships is about as common as violence against women in heterosexual relationships.

### **Legislative issues**

There have been numerous meetings, campaigns and conferences promoting legislation to counter violence against women and children and to punish the perpetrators. Several societies, non-governmental organizations, advocacy groups and international bodies such as the United Nations have requested legislators to protect women by drafting comprehensive legislation acknowledging that violence against women is a form of discrimination against them and a violation of their human rights. Legislators have been urged to define “discrimination against women” as any distinction, exclusion or restriction on the basis of sex that has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on the basis of the equality of men and women, of their human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field. They also asked legislators to provide that no custom, tradition or religious consideration may be invoked to justify violence against women. It is important to note that the definition of “violence against women” is intended to be all-encompassing, including domestic violence, sexual assault and harassment, early marriage, forced marriage, female genital mutilation, prenatal sex selection, virginity testing, HIV/AIDS cleansing, so-called “honour crimes”, acid attacks, crimes committed in relation to bride-price and dowry, maltreatment of widows, forced pregnancy, trafficking and sexual slavery.

### **Conclusion**

Although significant progress has been achieved, including tangible gains and improvements, in addressing this issue, much more needs to be done in order to overcome existing challenges.