



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
9 December 2013

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women

Fifty-eighth session

10-21 March 2014

**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 Passionists International, 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

Passionists International is a member of the NGO Working Group on Girls.

Passionists International applauds the progress made towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals, but wishes to urge bolder action in areas that impact the lives of women and girls. According to the 2013 report on the Millennium Development Goals and the observations of our members engaged in ministries throughout the world, the great majority of those who live in poverty are still women and girls. Girls are more likely to be out of school than boys among both primary and lower secondary age groups. Most maternal deaths are preventable, but progress in this area is falling short. And whether in the public or private sphere, from the highest levels of government decision-making to households, women continue to be denied equal opportunity to participate in decisions that affect their lives.

Members of Passionists International share a particular and grave concern regarding the violence perpetrated by the trafficking of women and children, rape, child marriage, female genital mutilation/cutting and other harmful practices, honour killings, pornography, sexual harassment and domestic violence. These forms of violence may be hidden or in full view. They occur at home, in the workplace, in schools, on public transportation and wherever girls travel or are isolated. They are also “underground”, entrapping women and girls in horrific forms of sexual exploitation, slavery and servitude. At times of natural disasters and military conflict, women and girls are extremely vulnerable to violence. This cannot be tolerated. With numerous others, we commit ourselves to educating and raising awareness, to advocating for the end of impunity for perpetrators and to supporting the needs and restitution of women and girls who suffer violence.

Passionists International would like to highlight conditions observed and experienced by the women and girls we serve in Argentina, Australia, Ireland, Papua New Guinea and the United States of America, particularly with respect to the Millennium Development Goals and violence against women and girls.

In Argentina, indigenous women and girls suffer several inequalities being indigenous, female and poor. These women also suffer from early pregnancy and prostitution. The state of poverty in which they are immersed and the sense of impotence they feel leads to this reality. Many retain a great sense of belonging to their community and struggle to break this cycle. However, limited educational opportunities exist. Women and girls in Argentina are also affected by the human trafficking at the borders of the country, a problem about which the authorities are silent. Our members report that young girls regularly disappear from the poor urban areas, lured by promises of jobs, but are undoubtedly trafficked.

In Australia, members note that, while progress toward equality of opportunity exists for women in the area of education, language barriers and the challenge of cultural adjustment limit the ability of many women to access all available opportunities. With regard to employment, gender inequality and bias continue to exist. The number of women in leadership and decision-making positions lags in many sectors, including Government representation. In the area of health, progress on the Millennium Development Goals has been made in the maternal health of young girls and Aboriginal people. Poverty and homelessness persist, however, and there continues to be a great dependence on charitable organizations for food. Our

members note that single mothers in particular struggle with recently reduced welfare benefits and that refugees and asylum seekers experience a wide range of socioeconomic barriers.

As Australia grows to become a multicultural, multi-faith country, the necessity to continue to educate and empower women and girls regarding their rights remains strong. While arranged marriages for young girls, honour killings, female mutilation and treatment of women as second class citizens or worse are illegal, it is suspected that some of these customs may be happening in the privacy of homes. Overall, domestic and family violence is high, though there has been an improvement since mandatory reporting was introduced and there is less stigma now. There is hope that, with continued and vigilant education and advocacy, attitudes and behaviour will continue to change.

In Ireland, our members note that women and girls are being “imported” for prostitution, under the guise of obtaining employment, and are aware that the challenge of outreach to these women is becoming increasingly difficult owing to the more hidden nature of commercial sexual exploitation. Over the past decade, Ireland has reportedly become both a transit route and destination point for sex trafficking, part of an international web extending across Eastern Europe, South America and Africa.

In Papua New Guinea, people face tremendous challenges in keeping pace with technology, industry, literacy and modern ways of living in the face of rapid development. Tensions exist between traditional culture and modernism, religious and secular, and from an overarching male-centred paradigm in institutions and society. Major challenges for women and girls exist in the sectors of resource development and environment, health, employment and economic conditions.

Women report persistent gender bias in cultural attitudes towards women and girls, particularly towards girls’ education and employment, and opportunities for political representation, decision-making and leadership. They remain vulnerable in a society that has failed to implement policy changes. Though there has been new legislation, the experience on the ground speaks of corruption and disinterest in executing policies relating to women’s rights.

In relation to the Millennium Development Goals, the World Health Organization reports that Papua New Guinea continues to suffer high maternal and child mortality rates, gender-based violence and gender inequality, increased health security risks from emerging and communicable diseases and inadequate access to safe water and sanitation for large parts of the population. Women and girls are the main victims of any corrupt, failed and dysfunctional system.

Papua New Guinea recently introduced compulsory primary and secondary education, but requires improved funding and changed attitudes towards girls’ education to adequately work. Women and girls continue to carry the burden of family under poor and challenging conditions, often doing subsistence work to make ends meet at the cost of their education. However, educated women are slowly making their way into high paying jobs in both the public and private sector.

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women has served as an effective launch pad for the cause of women in Papua New Guinea. Support received from the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action helped the movement for women’s rights increase in intensity. But in spite of policy initiatives,

Papua New Guinea has been unable to meet goals in legislative representation or protection from violence.

In the United States of America, there is observable progress on the Millennium Development Goals, but salary discrepancies and reports of gender bias still exist. Women's representation in national legislative bodies also remains low.

Consistent with the report of the United States State Department on trafficking in persons, our members note that the vulnerability of immigrants to various forms of violence and exploitation is especially high, due to poor economic conditions, social isolation and undocumented status. Our members have observed that in such situations women and girls have easily become victims of organized crime groups, lured into prostitution and other illegal activities, with promises of income and threats to their life and/or family or threats to report them to immigration services if they attempt to leave the situation.

Girls who are victims of abuse or runaways constitute a population vulnerable to sexual exploitation. Their vulnerability is compounded by uneven enforcement and/or outright criminalization of victims. In their 2013 report on confronting commercial exploitation and sex trafficking of minors in the United States, the Institute of Medicine and National Research Council call for all jurisdictions to develop laws and policies that redirect young victims and survivors away from arrest and prosecution and towards systems, agencies and services that are equipped to support their needs.

Through participation in the fifty-seventh session of the Commission on the Status of Women, we have become aware of the need for vigilance in the area of corporate sexual responsibility, through policies and practices that include zero tolerance for the purchase of sex by employees and a commitment to training employees to be alert and able to identify and report any suspected trafficking behaviours.

Passionists International, in reflection with our grass-roots membership, endorses the position of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) that a transformative stand-alone goal on gender equality, rights and empowerment should be established and must include freedom from all forms of violence against women and girls. In developed countries, such as Australia, Ireland and the United States, the Millennium Development Goals do not address the violence and vulnerabilities of women there, in spite of satisfying current objectives. Likewise, the experience of our members in those countries highlights the inability of the Millennium Development Goals to serve the needs to immigrant communities, who account for a vulnerable, exploited and violently abused population in those countries. Argentina and Papua New Guinea demonstrate that the absence of stand-alone goal hinders a country's ability to progress in the gendered initiatives of the Millennium Development Goals. In summation, the proposal by UN-Women positions the international community to better advance the cause of gender equality throughout the world.