



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
9 December 2013
English
Original: French

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 Regards de femmes, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General received the following statement, the text of which is distributed in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of resolution 1996/31 of the Economic and Social Council.



Statement

We consider it essential that the post-2015 women's rights agenda include their right, regardless of marital status, to register their children so that all children have civil status and can access education and health-care programmes and be protected from all forms of violence and trafficking.

The denial of that fundamental, too often unrecognized, right and the non-registration of the births of one of every two children in the world [60 million according to the United Nations Children's Fund – UNICEF] have to do with the difficulties, or even prohibition, encountered by women seeking to register their children.

These, legally speaking, non-existent children have no access to education, health-care services, and development programmes. Girls are more likely to be affected than boys. Their lack of a civil identity makes it much harder to mount effective opposition to early marriage, trafficking in girls and women, and all other forms of exploitation and violence.

Barriers to registration of births

Birth registration is not perceived to be a fundamental right by either the population, which fails to understand the importance of the civil status that comes with registration, or the State, which attaches no importance to knowing who makes up the population and no priority to endowing people with a civil identity.

Geographically, if the place of birth is far from a civil registry office, it is difficult and costly for parents to register their children (loss of one or two day's wages, leaving other children with no one to look after them). The economic obstacle to registration births affects both individuals, if the procedure is not cost-free, and the State, if it lacks the resources needed to establish and operate a civil registration service.

Patriarchal laws on the nationality of children and sexist discriminatory practices that prohibit mothers from registering them or deny them access to schooling and health care are also barriers to registration. Women in rural areas and pertaining to ethnic minorities, who have not had access to a minimum level of education, find it more difficult to register the birth of their children. Thus exclusion and poverty perpetuate one another in a vicious circle.

In some countries it is particularly difficult or forbidden for women to register their children. If the father is away for economic reasons or if he refuses to recognize the child, it is impossible to register the birth.

The problem is further exacerbated for single mothers or in rape cases.

Demands

We find it disturbing to ascertain that one of every two children in the world is still not registered at birth, despite international treaties and conventions, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. Moreover, the European Commission and

UNICEF have declared that the first right of the child – and the most important one because it makes it possible to claim the others – is a name and an identity. In addition, the High-level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda has recommended that States provide cost-free legal identity for all, for instance by birth registration (Goal 10 (a)).

We protest at the grave repercussions of failure to register a child, inasmuch as that child will lack a legal existence and be unable to access appropriate programmes and services when he or she grows up, and at the difficulty, or even impossibility, of women registering the birth of their children in numerous parts of the world.

We demand that every woman, regardless of her marital status, be able to exercise her right to register her children; that each State organize a cost-free and compulsory public registration service, open to all individuals living in its territory, regardless of gender, marital status, ethnic origin, political persuasion, economic status, language, and place of residence; and that birth registration and the issuance of a birth or any other civil status certificate be cost-free, with simple procedures facilitated by all today's communication media, via laws establishing such facilities in each State.

We reiterate that universal birth registration is needed for both the child and the country. It must guarantee for each child the enjoyment of her or his right to an identity and a nationality; it endows each child with a legally recognized existence and identity; it shows that a child belongs to a family and to a nation in which the child has his or her place and the right to participate; and it guarantees individuals, throughout life, the right to take part in the social, cultural, economic and political life of their country.

Best practices

Examples of best practices were submitted during the workshops in connection with the fifty-seventh session of the Commission on the Status of Women (www.partagider.fr) and the colloquium on “Children without civil status, women without rights”, held on 12 October 2013 in Bourg-en-Bresse, France (www.regardsdefemmes.com). Some best practices used in African countries include:

- (a) Benin: Fondation regard d'amour: defence and exercise of children's right to life, survival, registration, and to a family; advocacy for systematic birth declaration and registration and support for the issuance of birth certificates to children;
- (b) Burkina Faso: decentralized cooperation between the city of Grenoble (France) and the city of Ouagadougou in the area of civil status;
- (c) Côte d'Ivoire: innovative initiative by the National Organization for Children, Women and Families, aimed at improving birth registration in the Department of Bondoukou by implementing two arrangements:
 - (i) Community mechanisms to facilitate birth registration, comprising the head of the village or district, a civil registrar, a midwife, and local women's and youth associations (set up in 69 districts and villages and run by the local population);
 - (ii) A birth registration monitoring platform headed by the Préfet and comprising institutional and civil society representatives;

(d) Mali: experience acquired by FEMNET-Mali with birth registration in the Banconi, Mandé (Samanko) and Kangaba communes, and at Naréna in partnership with Kulu-Danemark;

(e) Morocco: Association solidarité féminine: work with single mothers and institutions;

(f) Senegal: activities carried out by the Legal Advice Centre (Maison de justice) in Tivaouane with regard to birth registration; civil status cooperation between France and Senegal; experience acquired by Association des juristes sénégalaises; paralegal training courses in various regions of Senegal; community-based birth registration in Vélingara and Kolda conducted by World Vision with UNICEF funding; reporting of births via mobile phone initiated by Aide et action in the Kolda region, in partnership with Sonatel (Groupe Orange) and Nokia.
