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**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 Solidarité agissante pour le développement familial, 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 Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo is striving to overcome a number of hurdles obstructing the country's development and attempting to solve certain problems by tapping the synergy created among several ministries, such as the ministries for international cooperation, planning, social affairs, agriculture and foreign trade.

Solidarité agissante pour le développement familial recalls the statement by the President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo at the sixty-eighth session of the United Nations General Assembly in September 2013, in which he highlighted the Congolese Government's principal achievements. He spoke about:

- (a) Implementation of the national mechanism for monitoring implementation of commitments undertaken by the Democratic Republic of the Congo;
- (b) Expediting and systematization of reforms to the security sector, especially the army, police and judiciary;
- (c) Decentralization, which has come one step closer to reality, following adoption of the laws needed for its implementation;
- (d) Reform of public financial management, supplemented by the entry into force of measures designed to clean up the business environment;
- (e) Revamping the independent National Electoral Commission, which was implemented without delay to advance the electoral process as a matter of priority with a view to holding local, municipal, provincial, senatorial, and provincial governor elections;
- (f) The holding of national referendums since 7 September 2013 aimed at achieving the national cohesion needed to overcome all the challenges facing the Congolese nation.

Despite the above, there have been no concrete actions with respect to women and girls, for instance in the areas of health care and primary education for all, not to mention the vocational training programme and recruitment of women to ensure their participation in decision-making in all sectors.

Indeed, the incidence of violence against women and girls in the Democratic Republic of the Congo increases by the day, as do maternal and infant mortality rates and the rates for girls and women deprived of a primary school education. Furthermore, the lack of social programmes for vulnerable women and girls after they have given birth leads to the death of both the mothers and their newborn children, for lack of effective follow-up care and support.

Source of conflicts

The Democratic Republic of the Congo is a democracy encompassing more than 250 ethnic groups, some of which engage in harmful traditional and religious practices that are placed above the laws of the country. While the laws of the Democratic Republic of the Congo discourage girls from marrying before their 18th birthday, there are plenty of girls who get married when they are younger than that. To do our job, we need to be clear, however, that the same problems are to be found in a number of African countries. Nor have we forgotten the efforts of certain

donors and creditors and United Nations specialized agencies which step in whenever the need arises.

Recommendations

Solidarité agissante pour le développement familial urges member States, above all in sub-Saharan Africa, to amend the harmful traditional and religious practices which, for instance, require members of different families to marry their nieces or cousins, or insist that a widow be “inherited” by a member of the deceased’s family, along with even more harmful practices.

We have noticed that the Government sometimes punishes women and girls by default. Rather than punish them, the Government should work with these women, who lack education, vocational training, or a programme to enable them to attend school. Most vulnerable women and girls are arrested for no reason at all and some die in prison without anyone intervening.

Solidarité agissante pour le développement familial has begun interceding with the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to amend harmful traditional and religious practices, as well as the Family Code.

Churches in the Democratic Republic of the Congo approve of women and girls spending a long time in church, rather than going to work. Some churches require 30 to 45 days of fasting; those attending such churches often die of hunger. Track needs to be kept of all that so that laws designed to protect and govern all of us prevent those who perpetrate such practices.

Solidarité agissante pour le développement familial suggests that donors and creditors, that is to say the specialized agencies of the United Nations and other funds and programmes, should help us by providing the technical, moral, material and financial support needed to implement a programme to help the Congolese population and help the Government achieve its objectives of ensuring a sustainable environment, peace, and observance of the law by all, while not forgetting advancement of the — above all post-2015 — Millennium Development Goals.

Solidarité agissante pour le développement familial calls upon the international community and the European community to help monitor mechanisms to be implemented by African member States and to encourage civil society to become involved in improving living conditions for the people of all Central African countries and especially our country, the Democratic Republic of the Congo.