



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
17 December 2014

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women

Fifty-ninth session

9-20 March 2015

**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”**

Statement submitted by Fédération européenne des centres de recherche et d’information sur le sectarisme, 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.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

When females are ensnared in a totalistic authoritarian organization or an extremist abusive group the effects can be very profound and penetrating. What is so important for society to understand is that international research has indicated that women make up a least 70 per cent of global cult members. It is important to observe that the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action can have a direct impact on the global improvement of lives of women and other females through the implementation process of empowerment, self-improvement and dignity.

Our federation is on the receiving side of women, teenage females and young girls seeking help. We have come to recognize the real damaging limits of living in a closed environment or mind set in totalistic cult organizations that are grounded in authoritarian leadership of enormous power imbalance between the leader and their followers. What is most revealing about this dynamic is the impact this has on women and other female relationships. Many extremist movements or even terrorist groups define females as lesser beings and must be totally submissive and obedient to non-female leadership directives beyond question on many occasions. One well known cultic organization actually taught that a woman's brain is half the size of a man's brain. This illustrates group doctrine can produce policies that interfere with societies expectations for women's rights and demonstrates a female's vulnerability to be more susceptible to power abuse in the cult. Fully informed consent and quality education about societal rights and female empowerment is what the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action is designed to address. The implementation stage is where concrete action can be meaningfully applied.

Societal expectations and human rights without discrimination or prejudice are universal and apply to democratic and free societies. The reality of cult life for women and other females stand in stark contrast to those global objectives. It is important to understand the categories of cult life and policies under the power imbalance of sect leadership directives that violates the fundamental rights and dignity of women and other females.

Stated in the Mission Statement of the Beijing Platform for Action, "This means that the principle of shared power and responsibility should be established between women and men at home, in the workplace and in the wider national and international communities." Our federation has experienced the serious need for female members to be especially informed and educated about their rights and privileges pertaining to the outside world beyond their totalistic group. Many cults have very limited and pre-defined roles for women and other female members. They occupy completely subordinate roles and positions in their closed world, cut off from access to mainstream society due to cult indoctrination and group practices. We have observed that many destructive sects deny access for the female members to higher education and advancement for more gainful employment or career advancement due to the surrender of personal autonomy. The problem cult leadership raises for women and other females is in the self-proclaimed absolute authority they exercise and abuse.

It is important to recognize the narrow constriction of a leader who requires total veneration, who directs decision making, especially in personal individual choices concerning mundane decisions in constricting everyday life while violating female human rights and beyond.

It is imperative to point out that most cult members are above-average in intelligence, come from stable backgrounds, and do not have a pre-cult history of psychological illness. Many female cult members are highly gifted and are attracted to idealistic groups rooted in self-improvement and making the world a better place. Their human potential for self-betterment and contributing to the greater society can be severely restricted due to cult controls over almost all aspects of their personal lives. It is so important to examine the various elements of the Beijing Platform for Action and implementation that is truly relevant to the rights and empowerment of women and other females in destructive sects for the year 2015.

Our federation has consistently observed that many women who are ensnared in cults are bound by poverty due to very restrictive cult rules and policies. Many females are not available for gainful employment due to lack of education in the outside world and those who are educated can be relegated to menial job tasks that do not interfere with the sect organization's obligations or dictates. The labour laws designed to protect the rights of females in the work place are difficult to access in many cases due to cult hostility to outsiders or non-group members. Most cults advocate sacrificial financial giving and many require financial support to remain active members in good standing. It is important to observe that the long term financial health and support of active sect members is deficient due to the financial practices of cult organizations. We have observed consistently when the rights for the economic welfare of women is neglected on a global scale and Member States will absorb serious costs of these deficiencies. Our professionals have observed when cult organizations do not provide medical care for their members or retirement benefits for the totally loyal members who provide sacrificial sect labour to their groups.

Another major arena concerning the rights of women and other minors is the issue of sexual abuse and violence against females of any age. The protection of female cult members from these abuses and violations according to implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in 2015 could provide serious assistance and prevention of harm that can have an impact for a lifetime. Minors or very young children are helpless to protect themselves from violence and sexual abuse if there is no required reporting of these occurrences. The implementation stage of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action can provide the additional resource tools needed to protect females and provide accountability procedures to take action against predators and child molesters who need to be stopped. Our federation receives repeated reports that the sexual lives of women and other females are manipulated, controlled and further exploited. As a result of power abuse they will continually comply with or suffer violence and abuse when lack of compliance causes punitive consequences. Meaningful resources provide empowerment for women and minors that truly need to escape harmful and destructive cult environments. The adversarial relationships to the outside world cut off the normal family or societal support systems while cult violence and sexual female abuse causes a crisis of conscience where outside support and assistance may be truly warranted. It is also important to observe the lifetime consequences of sexual power of abuse of cult leadership. Cult directives toward personal and enforced celibacy, authoritarian arranged marriages or mandated sexual relationships where violence is the means of enforcement. Enforced abortions are not uncommon when they interfere with group goals and objectives — especially in the area of finances that drain resources to the organization. We believe that the

serial sexual victimization to women and minors in cults is a human travesty and parts of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action can go a long way to address these unacceptable violations.

It has been consistently observed by our network of helping professionals that women become more susceptible to cults because sects offer them security and answers in a world where the surrounding culture can heighten their insecurity. Where cults present an attractive recommendation of security to people who are conflicted about career, the future, self-image and personal goals. After women and other females depart from these tightly controlled environments there is a serious need for equipping them through quality education and informing them about female rights and empowerment resources. Our federation is committed to assisting those women and other females as a resource along with ethical guidelines provided in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. There should be procedures for reporting complaints and violations along with recommended guidelines of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Groups that are identified in such complaints should be named and clearly identified and records maintained. It is important that these procedures be in compliance with all applicable laws and enforcement.

There should be an annual review documenting complaints received and actions taken.
