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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”**

Statement submitted by International Federation of Social Workers, 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 International Federation of Social Workers is an organization that supports and promotes the social work profession through a social justice and human rights lens, as well as through best practice models. Representing professional associations in 116 nations, the Federation supports the theme of achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women for the fifty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women.

The theme is reflected in the philosophy of the Federation, which believes that attending to the well-being of women and girls is essential for social and economic development worldwide. The Federation specifically supports Goal 3 of the Millennium Development Goals: the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women.

Challenges

Persistent discrimination against and violation of the rights of the girl child

Discrimination against girls around the world violates their basic human rights in many different ways, including through unequal educational opportunities and harmful cultural practices. The Federation firmly believes that all discrimination against the girl child must end.

One example of discrimination is early child marriage, which takes place in many parts of the world. A staggering number of girls (67 million) are married before the age of 18 years, and about 23 million of those are married before the age of 15 years. According to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), these numbers could more than double by the year 2020. Some of the child brides are as young as five years of age.

According to UNFPA, married girls face life-threatening health consequences. About 16 million girls between 15 and 19 years of age give birth each year. In 9 out of 10 of these cases, the girl is already married. Complications from pregnancy and childbirth are the leading cause of death among girls between 15 and 19 years of age.

Education

It is known that education is a basic human right. We must also become aware that equality in education can have a substantial impact on sustainable social and economic development. The Federation supports equal educational opportunities as a basic human right.

According to the 2012 “Education for all global monitoring report”, published by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 68 countries had still not achieved gender parity in primary education by 2012, and girls were disadvantaged in 60 of them.

Research has shown that progress is being made, however, and that, even though the gender gap in education still exists, it is getting smaller. According to the report, the number of countries in which girls faced an extreme disadvantage fell from 16 in 1990 to 1 in 2010.

Health

The Federation strongly believes that more needs to be done to help keep the women of the world healthy. Maternal health is one of the Millennium Development Goals and while maternal mortality has decreased significantly over the past two decades, according to the United Nations, more efforts need to be made.

Women across the globe, no matter their economic status or their location, need access to high-quality health care professionals within their own communities to help prevent birth complications.

According to the United Nations, most maternal deaths in developing countries are preventable through adequate nutrition and proper health care, including access to family planning, the presence of a skilled birth attendant during delivery and emergency obstetric care. The solutions are known; it is a matter of their implementation. Ensuring that every community has access not only to health-care professionals, but to educators as well, can help more women survive pregnancy and suffer fewer complications.

Poverty

Poverty is still a major issue for all genders, but women of all ages are especially affected. According to the United Nations, the proportion of people living in extreme poverty globally has declined by half since 1990. This fact does not account, however, for the significant difference in pay between men and women. According to WomenWatch, more than 1 billion people in the world today, the great majority of whom are women, live in unacceptable conditions of poverty, mostly in the developing countries.

According to UNFPA, 6 out of 10 of the world's poorest people are women who must, as the primary family caretakers and producers of food, shoulder the burden of tilling land, grinding grain, carrying water and cooking. Yet some 75 per cent of the world's women cannot get bank loans because they have unpaid or insecure jobs, and are not entitled to property ownership. This is one reason why women comprise more than 50 per cent of the world's population, but own only 1 per cent of the world's wealth.

The Federation believes that it is necessary to make efforts to ensure not only that women are viewed as equal to men, but that women have equal access to the services and support systems that they need to succeed. The work of a woman is just as valuable as that of a man. This fact needs to be recognized, and the roles of women in the workforce need to be better understood, so that women can be as successful as possible.

Summary and recommendations

Women of all ages, no matter their geographic location or their socioeconomic status within their communities, should not be discriminated against because of their gender. Whether it be violent acts, being forced to marry at a young age, not having proper access to education or health care or not receiving the appropriate wages for their work, women face discrimination, in one form or another, every day of the year. The Federation supports efforts to work on these issues, and is committed to ensuring that the world is equal for everyone, whether male or female.

The Federation makes the following recommendations:

- (a) Efforts should be made to increase education and skills training for women and girls in both urban and rural areas. Women and girls in rural areas are especially in need of access to technology in order to learn new, advanced agricultural methods;
 - (b) Policymakers, at all levels, need to address the structural factors that perpetuate gender discrimination in society. Such discrimination prevents women from having access to and participating equally in education and employment;
 - (c) Policymakers, at all levels, must protect women and girls of all ages from discrimination and violence;
 - (d) Special attention should be paid to protecting girls from unequal treatment and harmful cultural practices. Governments, civil society organizations and non-governmental organizations should work collectively to promote the rights of the girl child;
 - (e) Evaluation and monitoring efforts should continue to help better determine what trends have made a difference in the equality and empowerment of women and girls of all ages, and what needs must still be addressed.
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