



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
17 November 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 Society of Catholic Medical Missionaries, 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

We welcome the review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action at the fifty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women. We affirm that the promotion of gender equality, from a human rights perspective, and the contributions of women and girls, as well as their empowerment, are fundamental for sustainable development, as enshrined in the Declaration and Platform for Action and in international laws.

Despite 20 years of national and international agreements to advance women's rights, many of the goals of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action remain unfulfilled. The gender bias within institutional structures results in inequalities and discrimination. Such bias persists in the public and private spheres, as well as in academia and religious structures. The growing number of cases of violence against women, including rape and forced and child marriage, prompt one to ask whether we are progressing or regressing.

Women and health

Members of our organization are involved in delivering health services to marginalized people, especially women in the barrios of Peru and Venezuela, in Latin America, and in the slums and rural areas of Asia and Africa. The health of people is intimately related to the socioeconomic and environmental conditions in which they live. Women are particularly vulnerable, owing to their lack of knowledge about or access to health resources. Women and girls are often prevented from obtaining treatment because of poverty, their geographical location, a weak health system or discrimination. In Africa, HIV-positive women often face a greater degree of discrimination than men when trying to obtain access to health services. In addition to being a health issue, HIV/AIDS, and now Ebola, are threats to development and prosperity in the world.

A gender-sensitive response to the health-care needs of women must confront the changing social, cultural and economic factors that place women and girls at greater risk. Investing in women and girls is needed, with adequate funding for appropriate services, to ensure equal opportunities. Women and girls are disproportionately affected by the impacts of economic, social and environmental stresses and shocks because they bear a greater responsibility than men for the securing of shelter, food, water and fuel. The caregiving role of women is undervalued and underpaid. Increased access to professional medical care would provide women caregivers with the opportunity to contribute to other sectors of their communities. Healthy populations are important assets for sustainable development, and women play a major role in keeping the family and the community healthy.

Women and poverty

Studies show that people who fall prey to human traffickers are those in extreme poverty, as well as refugees from climate change and people who are leaving a country in conflict. A greater proportion of such refugees are women and girls. Unless the root causes of poverty are addressed, its consequences, which include human trafficking, child marriage, prostitution and other social evils, cannot be prevented. Rural women are the backbone of agriculture throughout much of the

developing world, producing half of the world's food. In some developing countries, however, women produce as much as 80 per cent of the food, but often do not get enough to eat! Rural women lack access to land, financing and natural resources. In addition, when women and girls do not have adequate facilities for safe drinking water and sanitation, their gender-specific needs expose them to violence.

Such social protection measures as conditional cash transfers and interest-free loans have proved to be extremely helpful in Brazil and India, among other countries.

Gender equality and human rights

"Women's rights are human rights" should not be a forgotten slogan of the twentieth century. In spite of economic development and all the advances in technology, women remain second-class citizens globally. There is no dearth of stories about the violations of women's human rights across the globe, including child marriage, child trafficking, female genital mutilation, rape and domestic violence, to name only a few.

Gender disparities remain deeply ingrained in education, with 28 nations in the developing world counting 9 or fewer girls in school for every 10 boys. In 2015, if current trends continue, 56 million children of primary school age will not attend school.

High-quality education is critically linked to girls' self-determination, improved health and social and economic status, as well as to positive health outcomes for mothers and children. Yet girls still account for 55 per cent of the out-of-school population. Education is important for women's empowerment.

States have a responsibility to protect all their citizens, especially the vulnerable and the weak. Accountability measures must be put in place to guarantee the human rights of women and all citizens.

If women are provided equal opportunities for education, health care, financial resources and jobs, as well as decision-making power, they will contribute to creating a better world. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action remains unfulfilled, because the policies that have responded to it tend not to focus on achieving either women's human rights or gender equality. It is time to formulate policies that tap the potential of women, which is an essential approach for the common good of families and of society as a whole.

Gender equality and sustainable development

The 2014 *World Survey on the Role of Women in Development*, with the theme "Gender equality and sustainable development", asserts that no comprehensive sustainable development pathway can be achieved without an explicit commitment to gender equality and to the rights and empowerment of women. According to its preface, the survey asserts the central role of gender equality as the global community grapples with the challenges of sustainable development and the definition of the Sustainable Development Goals.

The right questions to ask about policies are the following:

(a) Do they support women's capabilities and their enjoyment of their rights?;

(b) How can they reduce, rather than increase, women's unpaid caregiving work?;

(c) Do they embrace women's equal and meaningful participation as actors, leaders and decision makers?

For healthy sustainable societies, women must be integral to the decision-making process in policies and development programmes. Women are needed at the centre of the post-2015 development agenda if we are to envision sustainable development for all.

Recommendations to Member States

(a) Fully implement the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, as well as such relevant international agreements as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, to ensure that discrimination and gender biases are eliminated in local and national laws, policies and customs;

(b) Protect women's rights by eradicating unlawful and harmful practices that perpetuate violence against women, and implement Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) and subsequent related resolutions;

(c) Ensure the right to free and safe drinking water and private and safe sanitation facilities that are responsive to gender-specific needs for all women and girls;

(d) Ensure access to health services and eliminate all discrimination against women and girls;

(e) Remove economic barriers to women's educational access, and support and increase public spending for the education of women; provide incentives to encourage girls' participation in secondary education; and promote educational models that equip women to assume positions of leadership and to participate in decision-making;

(f) Ensure social protection for the weak and marginalized, as well as for the disabled and for women of all ages living in poverty.

It is our hope that, in the fifty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, every effort will be made by all in the greatest of goodwill to promote gender equality from a human rights perspective. The world is moving forward, and women must be valued equally for the sake of human development and well-being, and to leave no one behind.

The following organizations endorse the present statement:

(a) Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd;

(b) Congregation of Our Lady of Mount Carmel;

(c) Company of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul;

(d) Dominican Leadership Conference;

(e) Edmund Rice International;

- (f) International Presentation Association of the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary;
 - (g) Loretto Community;
 - (h) Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary;
 - (i) Sisters of Charity Federation;
 - (j) Temple of Understanding;
 - (k) UNANIMA International.
-