



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
8 December 2020

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women

Sixty-fifth session

15–26 March 2021

**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and
to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly
entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and
peace for the twenty-first century”**

Statement submitted by Imam Ali’s Popular Students Relief Society, 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

Diminishing violence through women empowerment and engaging them in life-determining decisions

Violence against women is a worldwide phenomenon that includes different types of verbal, physical, sexual, mental, and emotional abuse. Many forms of violence are embedded in the social-cultural landscape of patriarchy, traditions, and a greater unawareness of women in their rights. From early childhood, women are being praised to be silent and compliant. They learn to admit the dominant role of men not only in the household decision making, but also in their future life planning. In conservative societies, social factors also contribute to the intensification and continuation of violence against women including: lack of appropriate legislation to protect women; inadequate educational resources for women, especially in marginalized and rural areas; early marriage; economic barriers and unemployment; and intimate partner addiction. While it is crucial to rectify social factors to diminish violence, one of the most constructive approaches to reduce violence is a sustainable empowerment approach.

The goal of a sustainable women's empowerment is to improve their personal and social capabilities. In this respect, the first step is to eliminate the gender biases and the patriarchal view in their mind by education. They also need to identify their values and potentials to take steps towards personal growth and flourishing of their talents. The next step is skill learning and participation in the workforce, which increase their self-confidence and help them become financially independent. This process enables the women to become aware of their rights and learn to stay out of violence. In addition, they practice making decisions for their lives and gradually prove to their community that they can participate in decision making as an independent human being. Subsequently, the personal and social growth of women contribute to decline violence, both in their own houses and their community.

Imam Ali Popular Students Relief Society, as a non-governmental organization in supporting children and women in deprived and underrepresented regions, during last twenty years of its operation has faced all kinds of severe violence against women in such areas. Accordingly, Imam Ali Society has been actively pursuing women's empowerment in the last decade. One of the most effective and innovative empowerment interventions that Imam Ali Society has established is Employment House as an economic empowerment center, which lies at the heart of social entrepreneurship for women in marginalized areas. These centers build basic foundations for women to bring them financial independency and self-sufficiency. At these houses, all women start with talent identification and skill development. They follow their training by initiating a product development according to a previously conducted market research. While women have a chance to engage in a safe and positive workplace in which they can care of their children, they also receive emotional and social supports from trainers and social workers who use therapeutic approaches to assist women in regaining their self-confidence and self-respect.

Imam Ali Society has successfully empowered over 600 women in Iran to date. Women who are no more victim of violence, even if they previously were physically and emotionally abused by an addicted intimate partner or were forced to an early marriage. Attending Employment House empowers them to gain new skills, to become financially independent, and more importantly to make decision for their own lives and their children, which is also protecting their children from violence.

All of these training and services can increase the self-esteem of women over time. Increasing self-confidence on the one hand, and creating employment opportunities on the other, enable women to contribute to shape their future by

decision making even in a underrepresented and conservative community with poor legal protection, and to take steps toward a violence-free society. Although each society is dealing with many socio-economic challenges including economic poverty, cultural poverty, and inadequate legal protection for women, a constant presence of non-governmental organizations and civil society in this process, can effectively remove barriers in the existing trends of violence against women.
