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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 Legion of Good Will, 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

We, from the Legion of Good Will, are pleased to present our recommendations on the theme of the 67th session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women: “Innovation and technological change, and education in the digital age for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls.” We are a civil society organization founded 73 years ago in Brazil that works with social assistance, education, and social communication. Our model is replicated in six other countries by the Legion of Good Will of Argentina, Bolivia, Paraguay, Portugal, the United States, and Uruguay. Our work reaches 392 different cities in Brazil, with around 6.5 million services and benefits annually. This document focuses on our technology-based strategy for empowering women and girls who are victims of violence.

Before presenting our best technical practices that effectively help strengthen a multi-stakeholder network of social protection and gender equality, it is important to state that as far as the Legion of Good Will is concerned, the path to empowering women and girls is through a global platform of actions that are truly inspired by the ideals of solidarity and fraternal love. This is because the current inequalities and countless cases of violence that still plague societies are the result of maladjusted social behaviors, such as prejudice, intolerance, and indifference. That is why using new technologies and innovation is a crucial strategy for a comprehensive, ethical, moral, and spiritual reform in the world through education. This priority task will not only maximize the excellent results of multiple public policies, but will also prevent these ills from occurring.

In the first half of 2022 alone, the National Human Rights Ombudsman’s Office in Brazil registered more than 30,000 complaints and almost 170,000 violations involving domestic violence against women (the number of complaints is lower because a single complaint can entail several violations of a physical, sexual, psychological, moral, and property nature); and this reality is even worse than the data reveal: According to the Ministry of Women, Family and Human Rights, approximately 70 percent of the victims of femicide in Brazil have had no contact with the social protection network before.

Our organization raises women’s awareness on a permanent and preventive basis about this issue. It also offers support and individual care to those women who seek guidance for themselves and their children, who have suffered threats, domestic violence, and/or other types of abuse. Our social workers provide guidance on how to access the Maria da Penha Law, which establishes mechanisms for curbing domestic violence against women in Brazil.

The law came into force in 2006 and was named after the Brazilian biochemical pharmacist and social activist Maria da Penha Maia Fernandes, who was the victim of attempted murder, which left her paraplegic. Her struggle for justice in Brazil over the years proved fruitless, and the Brazilian government was held responsible for their omission with regard to this matter, which led to them passing this legislation on the recommendation of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights.

Maria da Penha, a symbol of the fight for a life free from violence, acknowledged our work with women who have had their rights violated: “I know that you’re working on the issue of violence against women and spreading knowledge of this law among children. We tend to reproduce what we’ve been taught, the good things we’ve learned, and the Legion of Good Will works in this direction. I’m honored to have my cause included in your work.”

Legion of Good Will's Being a Woman Programmeme

Ever attentive to this situation, the Legion of Good Will has expanded the use of digital technology in many activities in our social service centers, schools, and on our media (TV, radio, the Internet, and publications), in a coordinated and complementary way in order to form a “solidary, altruistic, and ecumenical society,” as recommended by our president, educator Paiva Netto. From these multiple actions, we have chosen to present our Being a Woman programmeme, which offers specialized psychological care and support to women and girls who are victims of gender-based violence to work on healing from previous experiences of violence, discrimination, sexism, and violations against women based on social constructions. One of the unique aspects of this programmeme is the individual and group online psychotherapy sessions.

Some 57 percent of the women who are helped by the programme had no income, with 35 percent looking for a job while we were helping them, and 7 percent attributing the fact that they were unable to break the cycle of violence to unemployment, which made financial independence a key factor for distancing themselves from their aggressors. In accessing this service for free, in the first three months of the programme alone, 64 percent of the women improved their self-esteem and self-image; 57 percent had greater awareness of their rights after the programme; and, most importantly, 28 percent of them began to break the cycle of violence and have their aggressor removed from their lives. Therapy has achieved its purpose of strengthening women psychosocially so they escape from violence and alleviate their suffering.

Humanized Technology

By incorporating technology, the programme is easily accessed by women and girls via video call using a low-cost messaging app. It has an innovative data system, which ensures consistency and information confidentiality by way of a virtual platform that includes unification, storage, and screening of data, appointments, and records. The system also controls the calls and messages among the professionals, the women who are helped, and the people interested in participating, which makes it possible to register the services provided in a safe environment. This mechanism protects personal and sensitive (confidential) information and monitors the effectiveness of the volunteers and professionals.

The practicality of this tool enables case studies, meetings for offering advice and sharing knowledge, selection and management of the volunteers online, which allows psychologists from all over Brazil to take part. This expands the reach of this service to regions where the public system is less available, but without losing sight of the quality, commitment, and humanized care provided. These actions using technology make access more democratic, help fight the social inequality that is linked to geographic regions, facilitate the engagement of various social actors in the cause of gender equality, and promote inclusion.

Solidary Empowerment

The thematic, reflective, and formative content of empowerment is also part of the programme's activities and promotes the creation and dissemination of knowledge via free messaging apps, which require few handling skills on the part of the women and girls who are helped. In addition to psychological help, the programme carries out social and educational activities aimed at community leaders and professionals who work with women and develops skills and abilities to deal with historical-

structural issues related to women's rights and to recognize situations of violence and abuse.

Our technical team creates short audio and/or video content that uses illustrative language to directly address the reality of the target audience and to facilitate an understanding of the more complex topics, which are structured in didactic sequences. These strategies are based on the pedagogy of affection and the Ecumenical Citizen Pedagogy, which make up the educational line applied in the Legion of Good Will's schools, on its communication platforms, and in its shelters and social service centers. Its formulator, the Brazilian educator Paiva Netto, has argued for decades that, "If technology, then, overcomes human barriers – the Internet is an example of this – it is essential that solidarity develops itself ahead of it, in order to illuminate its paths. We have never been at a more auspicious moment for demonstrating how potentially great the possibilities are for using technology in the service of people.

"Summoned by science, technology, innovation, and culture, but without ignoring the exalted spirit of human solidarity, at the conclusion of this meeting may we embrace together an agenda of accomplishments based on a common understanding that the members of the UN, since its foundation, have pursued, as have the women, men, youth, children, and the spirits of true Goodwill." We, from the Legion of Good Will, thank you for your attention and are at the disposal of the countries and organizations present at this conference to share our technologies and work methodologies with a view to improving and replicating the experience of the Being a Woman programme in new contexts, thereby contributing to the advancement of gender equality on the planet.
