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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”: implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives

Statement submitted by African Action on AIDS, Associated Country Women of the World, European Union of Women, Federation of American Women’s Clubs Overseas, Hadassah: Women’s Zionist Organization of America, International Association of Democratic Lawyers, International Council of Jewish Women, International Federation for Home Economics, International Federation of Business and Professional Women, International Federation of Social Workers, International Federation of University Women, International Inner Wheel, Pan Pacific and South-East Asia Women’s Association of Thailand, Salvation Army, Servas International, Socialist International Women, Soroptimist International, Women’s Federation for World Peace International, Women’s International Zionist Organization and Zonta International, non-governmental organizations 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 the undersigned non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, members of the Vienna NGO Committee on the Status of Women, present to the participants of the fifty-seventh session of the Commission on the Status of Women for information and consideration the following statement on the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS.

HIV/AIDS is a global epidemic threatening social and economic security, productivity and development. According to statistics from the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, some 34.2 million people worldwide live with HIV, and nearly half of them are women. It is also estimated that each year around 2 million people contract HIV and 1.7 million people die of AIDS.

Women and girls are particularly vulnerable to contracting HIV for social, economic and biological reasons. Women aged 15-24 years are three or four times more likely to acquire the virus than young men. Rates of contracting the virus among women are rising in every region and in most countries.

Child marriage, sexual coercion and violence, women's lack of power to negotiate safe sex, and other power imbalances and inequalities as well as poverty mean that women and girls have no control over their sexual lives. Very few girls and women in Africa, Asia and Latin America have access to information, sex education and reproductive health services that would empower them to protect themselves against HIV/AIDS.

Women who become infected with HIV/AIDS tend to be diagnosed later than men and have less access to therapy and shorter life expectancies. Violence against women is a major contributor to the spread of HIV/AIDS. Therefore, gender-based violence within the context of combating HIV/AIDS needs to be addressed. Progress in the battle against HIV/AIDS will not be achieved until women gain control of their sexuality. Women must know and feel that society supports them when they say no to unwanted and unprotected sex.

The vulnerability of African women to infection with HIV is strongly linked to their subordination to traditional and cultural values, which put them at the bottom of the socioeconomic pyramid.

People with HIV/AIDS still experience discrimination. Combating stigma is a human rights imperative and is of instrumental value in fighting denial and shame.

The undersigned NGOs express their commitment to work with Governments, other non-governmental organizations and the United Nations, recognizing that only a global programme can be truly effective in combating the HIV/AIDS pandemic, and call upon Governments to:

- Raise public awareness and disseminate information about HIV/AIDS
- Provide speedy, new and effective prevention programmes targeted at women, especially those living in rural areas
- Ensure equal access and medical care, including psychological support, to HIV-infected women, and give particular attention to the treatment of pregnant women and to newborn babies of HIV-positive mothers

- Disseminate examples of successful interventions, such as distributing free condoms for men and free “femidoms” for women, educating the public and reducing the number of sexual encounters, translated into local languages to facilitate replication
 - Reduce the price of medicines for antiretroviral therapy through a continuing dialogue with pharmaceutical companies
 - Encourage and fund international research and development to develop and produce vaccines for HIV/AIDS
 - Ensure accessible reproductive health services for women and girls, as well as access to testing, treatment, counselling, care and support
 - Facilitate legal action in cases of violence against women, including sexual coercion and rape
 - Foster and encourage the involvement of men and boys in HIV/AIDS prevention measures
 - Devise policies and allocate funds to provide for the prevention, treatment and care of people living with HIV/AIDS as well as other sexually transmitted diseases, and remove legislation criminalizing people who are HIV-infected and the transmission of HIV between informed, consenting adults
 - Foster respect for and enforcement of women’s human rights
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