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Statement submitted by Company of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, 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

Introduction

In many cultures, the girl child is vulnerable to violence from her birth and throughout her life; in some cultures, this begins even before her birth. Because girls also suffer from many intersecting forms of discrimination related to age, gender, level of education, isolation, poverty and the social group to which they belong, they continually face high risks of being subjected to multiple forms of violence.

Today, more than 20 years after the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, major challenges must be addressed if the Millennium Development Goals, which are vital to children's health and well-being and the realization of all children's rights, are to be achieved by 2015. In many countries, unequal access to education and health care is a persistent problem, especially with respect to girls. As a result of living in poverty, many girls are forced into situations of child labour to contribute to the livelihood of the family. Others become victims of trafficking with little or no access to the justice system.

Identity

Discrimination against girls begins at birth or in some societies even before they are born, as a result of female foeticide, infanticide, malnutrition and neglect.

Article 7 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child states that the child shall be registered immediately after birth, yet each year, nearly 50 million newborns, at least half of whom are girls, remain unregistered, primarily in the rural areas of developing countries. Inadequate infrastructure, low awareness among parents, the cost of obtaining a birth certificate and discrimination based on gender and ethnicity all contribute to this reality.

An essential first step in preventing discrimination and violence against girls is ensuring their legal existence through the official registration of their births and the issuance of birth certificates and identification cards. This is especially important in countries where poverty and inequality multiply girls' vulnerabilities. A birth certificate and a legal identification card guarantee a girl's basic rights and facilitate access to education and health care. They act as a protection against child labour and early marriage and make it easier to fight abuse and child trafficking. If a girl cannot prove that she is still a child, she is more vulnerable to being forced into early marriage, servitude or prostitution or to being trafficked.

Education

The right to education is also clearly stated in the Convention on the Rights of the Child; compulsory primary education is to be available and free for all children. Yet, girls comprise 54 per cent of children not in school in developing countries. Girls and women still comprise the majority of the world's illiterate. Inequality of access to education continues to exist at the primary level but is even more marked at the secondary level and at vocational and training schools. More attention must be given to gender equality in the school environment so that girls are safe and can remain in school.

Education is the key to breaking the poverty cycle. Interventions that enable young women to stay in school, acquire skills, avoid early pregnancy and delay marriage are critical to their future financial independence and productivity as members of society. Educated girls, when they become mothers, are also more likely to send their own girls to school and resist social and cultural pressures that discriminate against girls.

Child domestic labour

Of the estimated 53 million to 100 million domestic workers worldwide, the vast majority are women and girls. Of child domestic workers, 90 per cent are girls. The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates domestic service to be the single largest category of employment for girls under the age of 16. They are the most vulnerable of all domestic workers. Violence against girls who are domestic workers is not only a child labour issue but also a child's rights issue and a gender issue.

In most societies, domestic work continues to be regarded as “women's work”; in many countries and cultures, child domestic work, especially for girls, is seen as socially acceptable. The home is regarded as a safe and protected work environment for girls, and the work is considered good preparation for the responsibilities of a wife and mother. It is a common belief among parents that domestic labour is the safest form of work for girl children. At the same time, little value is given to formal education for the girl child. Prevailing social norms and cultural practices that support domestic labour and gender-based violence have a significant negative influence on all girls, especially those who are living in extreme poverty.

Girl domestic workers often work 12 to 18 hours each day to supplement their families' income. This deprives them of their education and places them at risk of physical, psychological and sexual abuse, which in turn increases their vulnerability to early pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases and AIDS.

Most girl domestic workers are live-in workers under the round-the-clock control of their employer. Their work includes a wide variety of tasks and services needed for the daily functioning of a household, such as cooking, cleaning, laundry, caring for children, the ill and the elderly, and doing errands.

Because domestic labour takes place in private households, it is invisible to the public eye, making the workers extremely vulnerable to exploitation and violence, including harmful or hazardous working conditions, extended working hours, the withholding of pay, beatings, verbal abuse, sexual abuse, restricted personal freedom and being locked indoors and being prevented from attending school and having contact with their family members.

Both migrant and trafficked child domestic workers who depend on their employers for food and housing are particularly vulnerable to added forms of violence, such as withholding personal documents, work permits, passports and visas, especially in those countries where domestic work is not recognized as real employment.

Because domestic work falls outside labour legislation in many countries, domestic workers are often unable to access their rights. The non-recognition of domestic work as legitimate work, combined with the hidden nature of the worksite,

frequently results in exploitative living and working conditions for the girl child, who is especially vulnerable.

In spite of the fact that children's rights are clearly articulated in both the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child and included in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, many girl children who are domestic workers suffer violations of their rights on a daily basis.

The ILO Convention concerning decent work for domestic workers (Convention No. 189), adopted in June 2011, and Recommendation No. 201 are powerful tools that can be used to prevent and eliminate violence for girl domestic workers, especially with respect to working conditions, wages, working hours, debt bondage and health and safety standards. States can be pressured to ensure that their national labour laws and policies are in conformity with the commitment to improve the living and working conditions of domestic workers contained in the Convention.

Every girl child is likely to experience multiple forms of violence in her lifetime because of discrimination. Birth registration, education and the elimination of child labour are effective ways to ensure her rights.

Recommendations

We strongly urge Governments to:

- Register all births and issue a birth certificate and identity card to every child free of charge.
- Make every effort to honour and protect the rights of all children, especially those of the girl child.
- Address the social and cultural practices that support violence and discrimination against girls.
- Provide quality primary and secondary school and vocational training for all children up to the age of 16.
- Provide incentives for parents to keep girls in school, such as the payment of fees, cash transfers and school feeding and sanitation programmes.
- Bring domestic work under the purview of existing labour legislation.
- Use the ILO Convention as a frame of reference in setting standards for domestic workers and conform their legislation and practices to the obligations in the ILO Convention.
- Integrate the recommendations of girl children domestic workers into policy and practice.
- Provide legal protection for the rights of domestic workers.