



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
7 December 2012

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women

Fifty-seventh session

4-15 March 2013

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 International Research Foundation for Development, 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

“There is one universal truth, applicable to all countries, cultures and communities: violence against women is never acceptable, never excusable, never tolerable.” — Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General.

For the fifty-seventh session of the Commission of the Status of Women, we, International Research Foundation for Development, express our unequivocal support for the priority theme: “Elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls”. We recognize, as do others in the development arena, that for women and girls to fully participate and advance in educational, socioeconomic, and political pursuits and indeed all spheres of life, their safety, dignity and personhood must be upheld, safeguarded and guaranteed by their communities, States and the international community.

“We must acknowledge that violence against women is not the root problem, but that violence occurs because other forms of discrimination are allowed to flourish.” — Rashida Manjoo, Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences.

In 1995, the Beijing Platform for Action identified violence against women, lack of respect for and inadequate promotion and protection of the human rights of women, and persistent discrimination against and violation of the rights of the girl child as critical areas of concern. Close to two decades later, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon’s campaign UNiTE to End Violence against Women, whose five goals are to adopt and enforce national laws to address and punish all forms of violence against women and girls, adopt and implement multisectoral national action plans, strengthen data collection on the prevalence of violence against women and girls, increase public awareness and social mobilization and address sexual violence in conflict by 2015, is testament to the tremendous work that is still to be done, particularly by State actors.

International Research Foundation for Development seeks to establish and maintain an integrated global network for scientific policy research and advocacy on contemporary development issues. We therefore stress the absolute importance for actors at all levels of society, including local activists, civil society and grass-roots organizations, States and regional and interregional bodies, to ensure accurate and timely data collection and dissemination of information around violence, while bearing in mind the importance of protecting women and girls from further violence.

“Gender equality and ending violence against women must be placed squarely at the heart of achieving the Millennium Development Goals.” — United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) — 16 Steps to End Violence against Women.

Women and girls around the world have long borne violence in various forms in the private sphere (in familial settings) and public spheres (at the community, national and international levels) and the shame and pain that it often brings. As presented in a fact sheet by UNiTE, approximately 7 out of 10 women worldwide experience violence at some point in their lives. Continued unabated violence against women and girls at such a high rate should be considered an enormous impediment to achieving the Millennium Development Goals. For instance, considering Goals 1 through 7, there is a clear intersection between all the Goals

themselves and violence against women and girls. A similar case can also be made for Goal 8.

Starting with Goal 1 (eradicate extreme poverty and hunger), women and girls living in this situation are likely marginalized and therefore vulnerable to exploitation and coercion through violence or the threat of violence as they try to engage in activities to ensure their survival. Moving on to Goal 2 (achieve universal primary education), some poor families facing competing priorities to care for their families may pull girls out of school so they can contribute to their family's upkeep through unpaid, underage work, while in some instances, girls may be forced into marriage, becoming child brides. This form of violence not only abruptly ends the girls' childhood but also puts them at risk of domestic violence, HIV and sexually transmitted infections, pregnancy and motherhood before they are physically, mentally and emotionally ready, creating a vicious cycle that may trap generations to come.

The ability to achieve Goal 3 (promote gender equality and empower women) is negatively impacted by violence against women and girls in areas such as higher education and the workforce. Where girls' safety at school or on the way to school is compromised, their education is interrupted, causing a ripple effect with the likely lifelong impact of limited opportunities for the girls and their future families. Similarly, in the workforce, sexual harassment and unwelcome sexual advances in exchange for advancement are not only an affront to women's dignity but also a tax on their aspirations and opportunities for their own growth and that of their families, communities and States.

Goals 4 and 5 (reduce child mortality and improve maternal health) are both challenged by violence in the form of practices such as female infanticide owing to male child preference and physical abuse in the case of pregnant women. Furthermore, the finding that the poorest women and those without education have the lowest use of contraception is particularly alarming not only because their reproductive health is jeopardized but also in relation to Goal 6. Halting new HIV infections and mitigating the impact of HIV and AIDS, especially among women and girls, may prove difficult in the light of violence against them. Specifically, even where there is a high level of HIV education and prevention information, women and girls still face the risk of infection owing to intimate partner and spousal violence and the related inability to successfully negotiate for safe sex.

With respect to Goal 7 (ensure environmental sustainability), the prevalence of slums and the extreme poverty and lack of access to scarce resources found therein pose a particular challenge when it comes to violence against women, girls and indeed men. Violence is used especially by men as an expression of masculinity and power over others and as a survival strategy in the commission of crimes and other antisocial behaviours.

Goal 8 calls for the development of a global partnership for development but, with official development assistance below target, developing countries have fewer financial resources to allocate to the elimination of violence against women and girls. Additionally, limited access to the Internet and related information and communications technology for many in the developing world is a possible barrier to acquiring knowledge about the prevalence and impact of gender-based violence as well as laws and resources to help people affected by it.

Ergo, using the achievement of the Goals as a blueprint for sustainable development, International Research Foundation for Development demands that all grass-roots organizations, States, non-governmental organizations, churches and other United Nations-affiliated entities take extraordinary, visionary measures to lead global efforts that transform words into action in preventing, mitigating and ultimately ending all forms of violence against women and girls. Action leading up to the time when violence against women and girls ends will require an holistic, integrated and interdisciplinary approach with multi-level actors using composite frameworks to continue to question inequitable gender and social relations and power disparities and to foster, champion and uphold women's and girls' rights and elevate their capabilities.

International Research Foundation for Development calls upon development researchers, professionals and practitioners to continue to weave the pursuit of gender equity into their work and bring their experience and ideas together to identify possible solutions and implement action strategies that address violence against women and girls as a threat to achieving the Goals, with the overall objective of preventing such violence by getting to its root causes. We propose that this will be achieved through the inclusion of women and girls in:

- Research and evidence-based advocacy and awareness-raising efforts
- Formulation of and adherence to accountability measures for actors at the community, State and international levels that have committed to the elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls
- Harnessing information and communications technology to disseminate information with as far a reach as possible for educational and reporting purposes
- Undertaking annual or biannual reviews of national, regional, and global progress
- Engagement of men and boys in exploring and changing customs that promote harmful male behaviours and in efforts that seek to eliminate violence against women and girls, while acknowledging that some men and boys are also susceptible to various forms of violence.

The Foundation shares in the global commitment to eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls and looks forward to partnering with others to safeguard women's and girls' abilities and confidence to live in and contribute to their families, communities and States and where possible, reverse the negative socioeconomic, psychological, emotional and overall health impact that violence can have on survivors.