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Statement submitted by Compagnons d’action pour le développement familial, 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

Our organization notes that violence against women and girls in the Democratic Republic of the Congo takes many forms:

(a) The violence is due to the severe poverty and destitution in which almost 90 per cent of the Congolese population lives. It is further exacerbated by the repeated unjust wars imposed in the east of the country by the neighbouring countries of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the main victims of which are women and girls;

(b) Most Congolese girls and women experience humiliation, lack of attention to their elementary needs and non-enjoyment of their fundamental rights from an early age. This results in the perpetuation of poverty in adulthood;

(c) According to the 2010 multiple indicator survey (MIS), in the 5 to 17 age group, 60 per cent of children (21.5 million) were working and the majority (67 per cent) were girls;

(d) Although they work in the same conditions as all other children, girls barely eat one meal a day and sometimes only three meals a week. They are exploited in dangerous, sexual and unhealthy work and drug dealing (cannabis and alcohol). They do not attend school, cannot read or write, and leave school early. They suffer from HIV/AIDS and are orphaned or widowed at an early age. They are abandoned in the streets and exposed to inclement weather and various diseases. They organize abortions and arrange for babies and other children to be killed and abandoned because of poverty. They live and sleep in streets filled with waste and refuse and have diseases that are destroying their health. Every day, they are shot dead in unjust wars, raped and forced into domestic service or used for housework and as couriers by militias and armed groups;

(e) According to the 2010 MIS report, 71.3 per cent of Congolese households are poor. They run the informal economy (75 per cent in urban areas and 95 per cent in rural areas), in which women provide the main support and are the pillars of the social life of their families. These women did not learn any trade when they were young that could enable them to earn a proper living and look after themselves. They do not know their rights and duties. They are subjected to sexual abuse and violence by their male counterparts, their possessions are taken from them when their husbands die and they are forced into marriage in deference to local habits and customs. They are held hostage all day long by leaders of religious cults and sects, instead of engaging in work that could give them satisfaction and an income. They look on, powerless, as those who are supposed to administer the law commit injustices and enjoy impunity;

(f) Men use women, who are in the majority, to obtain political posts in various elections. However, once elected, they ignore the needs of women, who are also underrepresented in administrative bodies;

(g) The indigenous population, and particularly pygmies, is undervalued in our societies. Pygmy women and girls are treated as slaves in certain local communities in Équateur Province. Marriage between a Bantu and a pygmy is taboo and is not accepted by society;

(h) Grass-roots organizations dealing with the advancement of women and girls do not receive financial or material backing and support that would make them more effective.

Recommendations

(a) Records should be kept of gender-based abuse and violence, showing the action taken;

(b) A comprehensive national programme for the protection and education of girls and women should be adopted, covering formal education (primary and secondary vocational) and non-formal education (literacy, education for life, remedial courses and job training);

(c) A grass-roots programme should promote awareness and dissemination of texts and laws concerning the protection of girls and women;

(d) Observatories of violence against women and girls should be established throughout the country;

(e) There should be grass-roots mechanisms for protection of women and girls against all forms of exploitation and violence;

(f) Capacity-building is needed for the judicial institutions responsible for prosecuting the perpetrators of abuse and violence against women and girls, so as to foster independent thinking by members of the judiciary;

(g) Members of the armed forces and the national police should receive training and information on provisions and measures to protect women and girls from abuse and violence;

(h) The programme of maternal and reproductive health should be strengthened and expanded;

(i) There is a need for a programme of employment and alternative financing for women.
