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Statement submitted by Ngoma Club, 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

Violence against women and girls is still an issue, well into the twenty-first century. Not a single day passes without acts of rape, harassment, beating, molestations of all kinds and insults against women or girls. Violence against women and girls is a scourge that spares no country and no continent. The eradication and prevention of this scourge are an international obligation established in international legal instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court and the various resolutions of the Security Council on the subject.

This is the context in which we approach this issue, in view of the reality of this scourge in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, an armed, post-conflict country, which constantly makes the international headlines for rapes and which used to be described as the world capital of rape.

Political context and current situation

The Democratic Republic of the Congo is one of the countries still lagging far behind as regards the eradication and prevention of gender-based violence. This study therefore faces up to this question and tries to depict the situation, as it exists. It will show how this problem continues to exist in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (causes, examples of violence, organization of social and cultural norms, difficulties and challenges ...).

Types of violence

Regarding the essence of the problem, it is important to start by distinguishing between the various types of violence against women. There are three types:

- (a) Physical violence within the family, for example:
 - Systematic neglect of girls
 - Forced marriage
 - Dowry-related violence
 - Beating
 - Sexual abuse of girl children
 - Sexual mutilation
- (b) Sexual violence within society, for example:
 - Sexual mutilation harassment
 - Intimidation at work and in educational institutions
 - Violence against women and girls in conflict and post-conflict situations
- (c) Psychological violence, covering all the acts enumerated above.

Current situation

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, a population and health survey conducted by the Ministry of Planning in 2007 revealed that:

- 64 per cent of women (two out of every three women) and 59 per cent of pregnant women have been subjected to physical violence starting at age 15
- One out of ten women between the ages of 18 and 49 was forced into her first sexual experience
- 71 per cent of women have been subjected to violence at home, which is the most common type of violence
- 64 per cent have experienced acts of sexual and physical violence
- 43 per cent have been affected by psychological violence.

There are several reasons for all these types of violence. This report will focus on some of them, namely:

- Custom
- Religion
- Structural reasons
- Political instability and armed conflict.

Here it should be emphasized that social norms, as established in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, derive mainly from custom and religion. There are popular slogans, taboos, attitudes and even legal provisions that help to perpetuate the various types of violence.

Difficulties and challenges

In addition, the mechanisms created to deal with this scourge are not always adequate. The current situation demonstrates that the agencies, non-governmental organizations, public policies and programmes in existence deal not with underlying causes but with effects.

For example, how is it possible to combat certain types of discrimination preventing women from preaching the word of God when the religious system (Christianity, Islam, Animism) even influences decision makers? Similarly, how can psychological violence be eradicated when the Family Code, which is a civil law, requires the husband to give permission for his wife to work? At the same time, an unmarried woman is treated with disdain by society and stigmatized.

Admittedly some progress has been made, such as the “All girls at school” campaign or the law on parity (30 per cent women in all the country’s institutions and organizations) but enforcement of these provisions is still problematic.

It should also be noted that Government decision makers are reluctant to honour commitments under international instruments designed to solve the problem of violence against women and girls.

It will be seen from the preceding paragraph that many difficulties persist, including:

- The particular features of society in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, torn between modernity and tradition
- Identity issues, particularly among women
- Women's lack of involvement (militancy) in structures to combat violence.

The Government, for its part, must strengthen its structures and programmes to combat violence against women and girls and expand its role in dealing with customs and religion, following the recommendations of the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, which invites States not to invoke custom or religion in order to avoid implementing it.

There is a need for bilateral and multilateral cooperation regarding legal matters and for training and education of agencies working to combat violence against women, so as to promote the active participation of civil society.

There is also a need to provide legal and psychological support to women by creating special structures (police, psychologists).

As regards prevention, the following measures are needed:

- All key actors must be brought together to eliminate stereotypes
- Legal actors must be trained
- Customs must be identified and modified, with formulation of norms regarding women
- Awareness must be raised among customary authorities.

Conclusion

The problem of the prevention and elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls has been considered in the specific context of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. At the outset, a distinction has been drawn between various types of violence and some statistics have been given.

The causes underlying this problem in the Democratic Republic of the Congo were then described. There was some criticism of the current situation, notwithstanding the difficulties and challenges.

These analyses show that violence against women and girls in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is far from being eradicated. And its prevention also raises problems. This is partly because of social and cultural norms mainly stemming from habits and customs, as well as from religion.

In this context, it is thus clear that public opinion is still extremely reluctant regarding prevention of this problem.

The State must therefore assume its responsibilities and use its authority to play a leading role in the prevention and eradication of this lamentable scourge. It must address sociocultural factors (clichés, stereotypes, prejudices, religions or ethno-tribal discrimination, discriminatory laws ...) and other acts, such as physical

and sexual aggression, forced marriage, sexual mutilation or sexual harassment, by forcefully punishing them and bringing the perpetrators before the competent courts so that justice can be done.
