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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 Stichting Spanda, 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

Rooted in the ethic of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and fuelled by a growing solidarity of women's efforts around the world, the last 20 years have succeeded in putting the issue of violence against women and girls on the global agenda.

The very definition of "violence against women", provided by the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (General Assembly resolution 48/104 of 20 December 1993), is indeed a cornerstone, as it challenged the misleading notion that violence against women and girls was a private matter and that home, family culture and tradition had to be the arbiters of just action where violence against girls or women was concerned.

However, notwithstanding the positive developments, the worst acts of violence against women and girls continue to shake the world. Women and girls are victims of violence committed by men inside the family; women and girls are trafficked and subjected to forced prostitution and slavery-like conditions; female workers face marginalization and humiliation, suffering consequent mental, physical and economic abuse; and girls in school are more and more often the victims of physical and sexual abuse. If the international community has struggled and continues to struggle to create laws to protect women and girls, a huge gap still remains between the legal apparatus and the culture required to stop the violence.

In this scenario, sound strategies for prevention must now follow the legal mechanisms created by the international community and be implemented at national levels to condemn any acts of violence and discrimination against women. Now, the challenge before the international community is to find the ways to create the social and material conditions in which women and girls can live their lives exercising their fundamental rights and freedoms and developing to their full potential. The creation of such conditions will clearly involve important changes to the political and economic structures of society, and, equally important, a sound transformation of those individuals — men and women, boys and girls — whose traditional values and cultural habits have sustained violent behavioural patterns.

From the perspective of Stichting Spanda, the understanding that individuals have spiritual and moral dimensions that shape both their understanding and their level of consciousness on the purpose of life, and on the responsibilities of individuals towards their family, their community and the world they live in, is core to any programme for social change. If changes in the legal, political and economic sectors are necessary to ensure gender equality, the development of individuals' moral and spiritual capabilities is also crucial to ensure respect for women's values and prevent the marginalization and abuse of women and girls around the world.

Spanda's extensive experience in using media tools to stimulate intercultural and interfaith dialogue on conflict prevention and ethnic integration and raise individuals' awareness to the vital values and sense of belonging to the human community has proved in various circumstances that media are very powerful educational tools. Media can increase the level of social awareness of individuals, support peacebuilding actions and stimulate creative and constructive interactions for the development of a better integrated community. Consequently, we believe that audiovisual services (motion picture, video, radio, television and music), owing to their ease of dissemination, vast outreach and instant appeal, are among the most

powerful and pervasive educational media to set examples of healthy male-female relationships and model roles necessary to transform fathers, teachers, coaches, employers, political representatives and religious leaders. Media outreach helps these individuals to become responsible members of the community, individuals that in their magisterial and authoritative roles support gender equality and prevent any expressions of violence against women; reject authoritarian rule and violence as means of expression; and support women in their efforts to achieve their individual and collective potential, realize aspirations and have a voice equal to men's in creating strong and peaceful communities worldwide.

In developed as well as in developing countries, the media may play a key educational role in delineating the core values of society, delivering ideas and raising consciousness about changes needed in individuals to create a culture where justice and equality prevail over the impetuosity of authoritarian power and physical force, and in improving the lives and status of women and girls.

In the light of the above, through this statement, Spanda intends to officially reaffirm the prominent educational role that audiovisual services may play:

- To enhance target listeners' and viewers' consciousness, provoke critical thinking and discussions and prompt specific action against violations of women rights
- To give listeners and viewers access to the resources and services needed to create a real change in their lives and in the life of the members of the community
- To help to generate questions and knowledge about women's concerns
- To provide women with a set of tools, the room and the power to speak out and condemn any kind of abuse

The statement urges the development of national and supranational audiovisual initiatives, as follows:

- To stimulate the production, distribution and promotion of programmes aiming at:
 - Setting examples of healthy male-female relationships
 - Condemning violence against women and girls
 - Promoting women's empowerment
- To produce entertainment and educational programmes and communications for positive changes in audience knowledge, attitudes and behaviours regarding women's concerns and related issues

Considering the capacity of audiovisual services to reach an important fraction of the target audiences, we call upon:

(a) Governments and the international community to ensure that an adequate proportion of resources is allocated towards projects which include the provision of audiovisual services aiming at catalysing social change and supporting community mobilization campaigns with respect to women's empowerment;

(b) Specialized agencies and bodies of the United Nations system to work together and make an intentional and substantial effort to support: (i) audiovisual

initiatives promoting the full capabilities of women for development and ensuring education in terms of cultural and ethical values; and (ii) audiovisual projects aiming at disseminating knowledge on women's crucial roles in past and present society, and women's efforts to promote peace;

(c) Non-governmental organizations to undertake any efforts to participate and contribute to the production, distribution and promotion of audiovisual initiatives that may help to recover the centrality of women and to encourage awareness of women's value and rights among women themselves;

(d) National and supranational educational authorities and media professionals: (i) to design and implement educational media messages aiming at increasing the target audience's knowledge of discriminatory actions against women; (ii) to insert critical information into educational media messages to capture the audience's attention with respect to violent actions against women and propose alternative role models which could encourage the target audience to imitate the modelled behaviour and allow themselves to be the main developers of community life; and (iii) to educate and train children in a way that makes girls and boys grow intellectually as well as morally together, cultivating in themselves a sense of dignity and responsibility for the well-being of their family, their community and the world.
