



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
11 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 World Igbo Congress, 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

Elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls: action call on cultural norms and values

World Igbo Congress welcomes the priority theme of the fifty-seventh session of the Commission on the Status of Women on the elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls. This is in recognition of efforts of the United Nations and Member States on gender equality and in ensuring that women and girls are placed at the centre of global issues.

World Igbo Congress recalls that within one year of its existence the Economic and Social Council established the Commission on the Status of Women as the principal global policymaking body dedicated exclusively to gender equality and the advancement of women. The General Assembly declared 1975 as the International Women's Year and organized the first World Conference on Women in Mexico City.

At the Conference, the years 1976-1985 were declared as the United Nations Decade for Women. In furthering the efforts of the United Nations on women, the General Assembly in 1979 adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The Convention, while targeting culture and tradition as strong forces in shaping gender roles, affirms the reproductive rights of women. In 2010, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women was established with the mission to accelerate progress in achieving gender equality and women's empowerment. From its inception, the United Nations has strongly stood against various forms of violence and has targeted its prevention in all declarations of human rights. The United Nations system continues to give particular attention to the issue of violence against women.

Violence against women, as viewed by the United Nations, is an obstacle to the achievement of the objectives of equality, development and peace. It also violates, impairs or nullifies the enjoyment by women of their human rights and fundamental freedoms. In accordance with the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, cultural violence against women constitutes acts that are explicitly justified or condoned through a misuse of cultural, religious or traditional beliefs, values, and practices that are meant to impose a patriarchal control over women and girls, including control over their bodies, their sexuality, who they love, who they marry, how they express themselves, what they believe and their right to exercise their free will.

World Igbo Congress notes that the Igbo culture has since its foundation enacted guiding laws that serve to protect Igbo women and girls from all forms of violation. World Igbo Congress recalls that violence in any form against Igbo women and girls is a serious crime in the cultures of Igboland. Rape, sexual assault, battery, abusive words, trafficking, killing and other forms of violence are against the norms and values of Igbo culture. World Igbo Congress emphasizes that violence against women is inherent in practices such as:

- (a) Female genital mutilation, in accordance with Igbo norms and values to protect women and girls from indiscriminate sex and prostitution;
- (b) Widow rites, whereby, in accordance with Igbo culture, a woman is seen as responsible for the family's expansion and continuity and must therefore

participate in certain rites upon the death of her husband in order to avoid a generational curse on the family. Such rites include cutting her hair during the mourning period so as to isolate her from other women and the advances of men and confining her within the environment of her husband's family in order to promote her security and provide protection by the family;

(c) Women's rights, whereby, in accordance with Igbo culture, the security of every woman is considered to be the responsibility of her husband and his people. As a result, all her rights are controlled by her husband, whose responsibility it is to ensure her security outside of the family as well;

(d) Child marriage, whereby, in accordance with Igbo culture, it is believed that by the time a girl reaches puberty, she has learned from her mother all she needs to manage her home; if not married, she could be raped and subjected to family customs. As a result, the family looks out for her marriage while the community sees her as a potential wife for an ideal home. Her marriage at that age honours both her femininity and the integrity of her family;

(e) High bride prize, whereby, in accordance with Igbo culture, giving the hand of their daughters in marriage is not considered a commodity but rather a prize. Any other traditional marriage demands are done in line with the customs of the land for family continuity and relationships. Neglect of any part of this arrangement is regarded as endangering the bride in her new home and her children.

World Igbo Congress believes that some of these cultural dynamics to protect Igbo women and girls have been discontinued as a result of societal change; neglect of family norms in accordance with modern education practices and civilization; poverty; norms and values losing power and significance; self-reliance; and attention focused on the struggle for existence and status.

World Igbo Congress posits that as the world moves forward on global sustainable development, there is the overarching tendency for violence against women and girls to increase greatly. Women and girls are no longer under the constant protection and care of their families; there is a high demand for acquisitions to meet the needs and demands of daily living; self-reliance and decision-making have changed the traditional norms and values to protect Igbo women and girls from violence. It is on record that a good number of Igbo women and girls experience various forms of violence each day and are not protected. The results of such experiences are a high rate of divorce, single parenthood, shared children, an increase in gender inequality, envy and jealousy, killing and death. The continuity of the Igbo race is therefore very slim, and urgent action is therefore needed to ensure that a regard for culture, values and norms is part of the United Nations approach to eliminate and prevent all forms of violence against women and girls.

Action call on cultural norms and values as best practices

The Women and Family Affairs Committee of World Igbo Congress is charged with the responsibility of protecting women, children, girls and the family in line with the mission of World Igbo Congress through community outreach, media outreach, conferences, campaigns and discussion forums in order to eliminate and prevent all forms of violence against women and girls. The Women and Family Affairs Committee has noted the following as practices to achieve that goal:

- Undertaking open campaigns and public awareness-raising activities
- Educating families about Igbo traditional culture and norms
- Providing rights education and female child-rearing practices
- Improving the Igbo legal system, which is rooted in the values and norms of Igbo culture
- Encouraging diaspora support for Igbo women and families
- Getting women involved in decision-making concerning women at all levels

Recommendations

World Igbo Congress, in stressing the need for an action call on cultural norms and values, requests the Commission to urge Member States to:

- Revisit the values and norms of various cultures of the world in their efforts to end violence against women and girls
- Work with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and the Commission on the Status of Women to establish a framework for an integrative grass-roots approach in cultural diversity in respect of the elimination and prevention of violence against women and girls
- Prioritize the need to combat violence against women in the security programmes of local communities in order to empower girls, widows and the vulnerable groups
- Increase community partnerships among women's groups and educate them on security protection floors that will be utilized effectively in protecting women and girls in the community
- Consider changes to most cultural norms that are rigid and make them more flexible and challenging in promoting the rights of women and girls at all levels
- Adopt a comprehensive and universal cultural approach to ending all forms of violence against women and all its consequences
- Encourage Governments to share best practices in the production of informational material and sensitization programmes on cultural norms and values for men and women, boys and girls in rural communities

Conclusion

World Igbo Congress is committed to working resourcefully and effectively through research, empowerment and educational programmes with Governments, civil societies and other partners to ensure that a community cultural dialogue and competence act can be established as an action call for the elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls.