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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 Company of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul and International Association of Charities, non-governmental organizations 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

The International Association of Charities affirms that extreme female poverty is a form of violence against women that forces them to fight every day for the recognition of their most elementary rights, material rights such as the right to food, lodging and education and also human rights and the rights to dignity and physical and personal integrity. Women also suffer from the violence created by contempt and indifference. The poor, especially women, are not considered to be human beings. They tend to be invisible.

The Association affirms that the fight against poverty cannot be effective without the empowerment of women suffering from poverty. The 200,000 Association volunteers in 52 countries worldwide work to empower women and girls by elaborating projects in response to the needs of the local poor and reinforcing their participation and social inclusion, especially by promoting formal and informal education, economic development, vocational training, health care and the safeguarding of women's civil and personal rights.

We have seen this very clearly in an Association project with indigenous women in Viet Nam, where, owing to the fact that many generations of men were raised to fight, the domestic violence rate is very high. In this project, women were trained and supported to become successful coffee farmers. This transformed them into leaders in their communities, giving them a strong position in their families and enabling them to provide education for their girl children. In our projects all over the world, we have seen what statistics confirm: that educated mothers do have healthier babies, that more educated mothers are married and that more children whose mothers are educated go to school. Investing in the education of women and girls is a strong argument against violence.

Nevertheless, for many women, access to formal education is difficult. We therefore ask the international community to provide new opportunities for informal education, especially for women and girls who are excluded from formal education because of poverty or cultural or religious traditions.

Informal education can be especially effective in responding to cultural traditions and customs and in providing opportunities to women of all ages and family situations. For a woman, it is never too late to be educated.

One of the most powerful tools to fight violence against women and girls is education. Education and vocational training empower women and girls, strengthening their self-confidence and competences and awakening capacities. It helps women to say no to violence. Education and the economic independence resulting therefrom give women a new and stronger position in the family and the community.

Recommendations

The Association calls upon international institutions to reinforce their efforts to eliminate all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls and to assist victims.

The Association recommends that Governments provide mandatory education for all girls and boys up to and including the age of 16 years, including children suffering from a handicap.

Convinced that education is one of the surest ways to move out of poverty, the Association recommends that Governments honour the right to education of all children, especially girls, by providing free education or financial assistance in case of need.

The Association recommends that Governments make informal education and vocational training available to all adolescent girls and women.

New forms of informal and integral learning should include the teaching of human rights and strategies to prevent and overcome situations of violence at home, in the workplace and in society.
