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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 National Council of Women of Great Britain, 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

The National Council of Women of Great Britain, founded in 1895 and affiliated to the International Council of Women in 1897, was granted special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council in 2000. It has more than 40 nationally affiliated organizations in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and throughout its long history has consistently worked on issues, such as violence against women, which erode the human rights of women and girls.

The National Council believes that progress on the priority theme of the current session of the Commission on the Status of Women — elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls — is an essential element in action to improve the lives and status of women and girls, to upgrade their role in society and to enable them to contribute to the economic welfare of their countries.

Violence against women and girls takes many forms, all damaging to the physical and mental health of victims, of which the most commonly experienced are domestic violence, rape and sexual abuse. Other forms of violence that have appeared in European and other countries, and that erode the status of women and girls, include trafficking in women and girls for sexual exploitation or forced labour purposes, rape in conflict and post-conflict zones, forced marriage, female genital mutilation, honour killings and other practices of so-called “cultural” origin, which are damaging to women and infringe their human rights.

The growth of the pornography industry has also damaged the perception of women as equal partners in a modern State. By encouraging and popularizing the practice of violence against or degrading behaviour towards women and girls, pornography, including Internet pornography, may increase the risks of violence that women and girls face in their daily lives, whether from random attacks, from drug or alcohol-fuelled incidents or as episodes of child abuse and domestic violence.

The role of men and boys in work towards establishing the equal status of women and girls in society is clearly key to establishing recognition of women’s equal rights to live free from intimidation or violence. To this extent, the review theme at the current session of the Commission on the Status of Women — equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men — is vital to securing any positive action to eliminate or prevent violence against women. Responsibility lies also with Governments to ensure that legislation to prevent violence against women is enacted and implemented.

Ongoing action against violence against women, in which the National Council and other partner non-governmental organizations have been involved for many years, includes consultations with Governments; the raising of awareness of the need for changes in attitudes and in legislation; participation in seminars; and circulation of a wide range of policy resolutions covering many aspects of violence against women, such as sexual exploitation, denial of women’s human rights, safe houses for women victims, trafficking, rape in conflict situations, pornography (most recently, Internet pornography) and all forms of domestic violence that can shatter the home lives of children and adults.

The National Council has always considered it important to acknowledge the Convention on the Rights of the Child in work against violence, in the knowledge

that violence against women can easily be translated into violence against the girl child and serious incidents of child abuse.

The National Council also participates in international work on violence against women within the International Council of Women and the European Centre of the International Council of Women and in association with the European Women's Lobby.

The National Council recommends that, in national and international committees, greater emphasis should be put on the damage to society caused by violence against women and girls and that steps should be taken to ensure that this is brought within the criminal law of each country. Provision should be made for the full implementation of such legislation.

Educational programmes to promote gender equality, including recommendations against all forms of violence against women and girls, should be undertaken by United Nations institutions and by aid-giving bodies.

Governments should be asked to introduce new guidelines for police, doctors, prosecution services and the media on the serious implications of violence against women and girls for the health of the community and to bring about improvements in the lives of their peoples.

The extent of violence against women and girls is clearly linked to the status accorded to them in individual countries. Where countries continue to undervalue women's contribution to society, there is little incentive to encourage girls' education to enable women to contribute to the economic well-being of their countries. Internationally, greater emphasis should be put on the need to change attitudes among the male population and to recognize the human rights of the female population.
