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Statement submitted by Legião da Boa Vontade, 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 present statement submits the recommendations and good practices of Legião da Boa Vontade, a Brazilian non-governmental organization, to the Commission on the Status of Women.

Legião da Boa Vontade defends the emphasis on education and re-education as a highly effective strategy for preventing and combating all forms of violence against women and girls. The purpose of the success stories shared herein is to contribute to the action plan that will be decided for the post-2015 period, a subject that is to be debated at the fifty-eighth session of the Commission.

Legião da Boa Vontade was founded in Rio de Janeiro, on 1 January 1950, by the journalist, radio broadcaster and social activist Alziro Zarur (1914-1979), who was succeeded by journalist, radio broadcaster, and writer José de Paiva Netto, who now presides over the organization. Legião da Boa Vontade maintains 87 educational and social service centres across Brazil and in six other countries (Argentina, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Paraguay, Portugal, the United States of America and Uruguay). In 2013, the organization provided more than 10 million services and benefits to people in vulnerable situations or at social risk (56 per cent of which are specifically provided to women). In addition to its schools, social service centres and homes for the elderly, Legião da Boa Vontade has a broad social communication network (through radio, television, the Internet and publications) dedicated to fostering education, culture and citizenship.

Violence against women

The first global challenge is to reduce the number of women who die as a result of violence, a phenomenon known as femicide. The Maria da Penha Law has led to considerable progress in terms of the legal protection of women in Brazil. Today, in addition to strengthening mechanisms for the application of this law, the search for complementary strategies is being discussed. In this context, Legião da Boa Vontade highlights the low levels of education of many of the victims and, above all, the “cultural acceptance” of violence against women. Femicide is the cruellest aspect of a problem that, in itself, is frightening because it silently turns women and children into victims.

In an article entitled “Patrimonial violence”, José de Paiva Netto warned about this form of violence, by which women who want to work are prevented from doing so by their partners who may reach the point of destroying personal documents, the couple’s property and working tools, and even go so far as to expel their wives and children from the home as means of suppressing their will to work. Brazilian courts are overloaded with such cases. Given this situation, the author concludes: “Assistance for the victims of violence, in its various aspects, has to become a reality. It is the duty of all of us and of the constituted authorities to do so. And such help has been given in advance, thereby preventing it from happening”. To our organization, “getting there in advance” means raising awareness of the problem through education and in public affairs in order to produce the necessary cultural transformation in gender relations.

The feminization of poverty

The world scenario is cause for enormous concern: the economic, environmental and food crises, in addition to the increase of social inequality in almost all countries, are mutually strengthening and are putting at risk the important (although still limited) progress that has already been achieved in gender equality. Poverty, unemployment, lack of adequate access to sanitation, education, health and food affect women first and more intensely.

Consequently, other social indicators deteriorate, since women are generally the ones responsible for caring for the children, the elderly, the sick or those with disabilities. In a statement written for the forty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, our organization's President emphasized the fundamental role of women, affirming that societies that oppress them do it to themselves. An enlightened woman makes the family link strong, and creates a grand, moral, respected and united community.

What distinguishes the experience of Legião da Boa Vontade from others lies in its holistic and complete view of human beings and their eternal spirit. This is why we design various strategies for overcoming violence and inequality around one specific central point: lifelong education.

Our schools develop social assistance programmes focused on the specific needs of children from the ages of four months old until adolescence. The organization also produces content for public life-affirming campaigns that are disseminated by various forms of mass communication.

There are many challenges for developing nations, such as those in Latin America, in universalizing early childhood education and extending the academic journey for children and teenagers. This precarious situation prevents many mothers from working in the formal sector. As a result, family income is drastically reduced and women lose their autonomy in relation to their partners or family members.

In this scenario, our programme, "Children: the future in the present!", offers social and educational workshops for 10,000 children and pre-teens during off-school hours and guarantees social support for families. Themes like citizenship, gender equality and youth are developed with the children, parents and legal guardians. Legião da Boa Vontade professionals are also trained to identify and help find solutions for cases of domestic violence and sexual abuse.

In the learning and interaction programme, Legião da Boa Vontade approaches these themes in a more comprehensive manner with teenagers, adults and elderly women. This initiative helps more than 5,000 people per year, raising awareness of the mechanisms available for ensuring their rights while helping to create and strengthen fundamental social and community ties required for the emancipation of women and for overcoming degrading situations. The organization's support is complemented by the training and productive inclusion programme, which prepares participants for the formal labour market or for becoming entrepreneurs. The programme promotes income-generating activities aligned with the reality of the community that is being assisted. In the Plurinational State of Bolivia, for example, the Legião da Boa Vontade encouraged the creation of a cooperative for the production of brooms made from recycled materials, helping to not only reduce polyethylene terephthalate (PET) discarded bottle waste, but also to significantly improve family incomes.

In cases where a woman is a community leader who acts as a spokesperson with the Government on issues involving sanitation, housing and urban infrastructure, she can find training and a place for exchanging experiences with others through the actions of the Legião da Boa Vontade Solidary Society Network. As part of this initiative, multi-stakeholder leaders from the public and private sector, universities and civil society act in a network that enables the development of partnerships and influences public policies.

Women's health

In the health area, the persistence of high rates of maternal mortality, particularly in southeast Asia, sub-Saharan Africa and in specific regions of developing countries, as well as high rates of HIV/AIDS in countries in Africa and the Caribbean, are putting sexual and reproductive health at the centre of discussions for promoting the quality of life of the female population worldwide. The Legião da Boa Vontade has vast teaching experience in the area of family planning, and in the prevention of sexually-transmitted diseases. In addition to its interdisciplinary work in basic education, 13 years ago the organization implemented a subject in its school curriculum called "Convivência" (Living Together). By involving youth in research activities that critically examine social behaviours and their influence on society, the organization helps them to establish relationships on an equitable, mature and safer basis, including, importantly, a perspective of gender equality.

Another continuing activity of our organization in this area is the "Baby citizen" programme, which provides psychological and social support to hundreds of mothers every year. It offers guidance on how to have a healthy maternity, healthy birth and recovery and necessary care throughout the child's first year of life.

The target audience is women, both pregnant and with newborns, who are facing financial difficulties, psychological problems and instability in their family or marital relationships. Aggravated by a lack of pregnancy planning, and by social and family pressures, especially from their partners, such situations may cause great emotional conflict that may lead to precipitous acts, with possible permanent physical and psychological consequences.

To guarantee the right to a safe maternal experience for all women, the organization recommends that initiatives like the "Baby citizen" programme, which includes social and psychological support for pregnant women (allied to prenatal medical care), be replicated and/or influence more comprehensive public policies to meet the needs of more women at social risk, counting, whenever possible, on the help of the private sector and civil society.

Legião da Boa Vontade also acknowledges the efforts undertaken in Brazil to guarantee the right for all Brazilian children to paternal recognition. After all, as the President of Legião da Boa Vontade has declared since 1980, "the State and society united must manage solutions so that families can raise and educate their children in a dignified way".

Education with values

The organization's educational model has been replicated by other learning institutions, both public and private, and has received academic recognition. The

organization is willing to share its unique pedagogies and work methodology with other social and educational institutions in other countries that are interested in adapting them to suit their local needs.

In addition to the academic curriculum of traditional schools, which expects students to acquire a certain amount of knowledge and a number of competencies in each year of schooling, the Legião da Boa Vontade establishes teaching objectives for the development of citizenship values, including strategies and specific mechanisms for assessment. Based on this principle, the discipline of “ecumenical culture” develops in-depth periodic social and cultural themes structured for various grade levels, which are simultaneously integrated with the other academic disciplines in a cross-curricular approach.

An example of one of the periodic themes worked on was charity, which is considered, in essence, as a synonym for fraternal love. On 5 September 2013, the world observed the first International Day of Charity, an annual celebration created by the United Nations. This recognition represents an important step towards the humanization of public policies that takes into consideration the affective and spiritual dimension of the human being. The Legião da Boa Vontade, which, in 2014, will complete a 20-year association with the Department of Public Information of the United Nations and 15 years of general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, expresses its satisfaction in having been able to contribute to this transformation. Since the beginning of its relationship with the United Nations, it has always sought to present its perspectives on global issues inspired by fundamental principles of solidarity, altruism, fraternal love, spirituality and all-encompassing ecumenism. The organization considers that these universal values are essential to building a fair society without discrimination on the basis of gender, race, sexual orientation, religion or social condition.

Regarding the notion of charity, the President of Legião da Boa Vontade wrote in a statement submitted in 2007 to the High-level segment of the Economic and Social Council in Geneva: “Charity, in its deepest expression, should be one of the main statutes of politics, because it is not restricted to the simple and praiseworthy act of giving a piece of bread. When understood in its broadest sense, charity is the sentiment that — illuminating the soul of the executive, legislative and judicial branches of Government — shall lead the people to a regime in which solidarity is the basis of the economy. This requires a popular and academic cultural reform through ecumenical spirituality”.
