



## **Economic and Social Council**

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### **Commission on the Status of Women**

#### **Fifty-eighth session**

10-21 March 2014

**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 Society of Catholic Medical Missionaries, 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 significant progress made in achieving the Millennium Development Goals cannot be ignored or denied. It is a known fact that faith-based organizations have played an important role in the pursuit of the Goals, including food and hunger programmes, education, health care, housing, water and sanitation. We continue to do so particularly in areas where government services are unavailable. Our collective experience urges that the globally agreed goals to fight poverty should continue beyond 2015, since 870 million people still grapple with the reality of hunger and poverty every day.

Large-scale social and economic transformation, partnerships and political will is required if we are to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. We recognize the significant progress made. However, existing commitments remain far from realized. We affirm that the promotion of gender equality from a human rights perspective and the contributions and empowerment of women and girls are fundamental, as enshrined in the Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women, and international laws are necessary not only to meet the Goals but also to contribute to and strengthen the post-2015 development agenda.

### **Women and poverty**

It is increasingly recognized that poverty is still heavily concentrated in rural areas (where 75 per cent of the world's working poor live) and that achieving substantial progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals as well as other international development goals depends heavily on improving agricultural and rural development. According to the International Labour Organization, 60 per cent of the working poor are women. Working poverty shares many of the characteristics of extreme poverty.

The rural poor are predominantly smallholder farmers (particularly in sub-Saharan Africa) or agricultural wage labourers (particularly in South Asia). Rural women are the backbone of agriculture throughout much of the developing world. They produce half of the world's food; in some developing countries, women produce as much as 80 per cent of the food but often do not get enough to eat. In this context, the food security bill of India is commendable and to be replicated in countries facing similar situations.

### **Poverty and social evils**

According to the World Bank, Millennium Development Goal 1, to halve the number of people living in extreme poverty, was achieved by 2010. But what they have not realized is that poverty is taking new shapes, such as human trafficking, and is increasing. Studies shows that those who fall prey to human traffickers are those in extreme poverty, climate refugees and those who leave their countries after conflict, most of whom are women and girls. Without addressing the root cause of poverty, its consequences, such as human trafficking, child marriage, prostitution and other social evils, cannot be prevented.

There is no check on multinational companies, especially extractive industries, which not only exploit natural resources, particularly in the global South beyond the planetary boundaries, but also destroy the land and livelihood of indigenous communities, pushing them in to extreme poverty.

## **Health**

Great advances have been made in the Millennium Development Goals on health issues, as health is related to more than five out of the eight Goals. Access to health services for women and girls remains vitally important. The faith community has provided a broad spectrum of health services, including maternal and child health services, which have contributed to the achievements in their respective Millennium Development Goals.

Lack of basic medical care and nutritional supplements, high rates of maternal and infant mortality and the continued spread of HIV/AIDS and other diseases mean that many women and girls serve as caregivers for their families and other members of the community without proper protection (especially from HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and other contagious diseases).

Women's caregiving work is not valued or paid. Increasing access to trained medical care would provide women caregivers with the opportunity to contribute other skills to their communities or to be paid adequately for the skills they provide.

## **Education**

According to the Education for All Monitoring Global Report of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the financial crisis is driving millions into extreme poverty. The report also finds that low-income countries provide poor quality education and that, particularly in India, caste systems obstruct education in South Asia.

The report mentions that, with the world's largest illiterate population, India has been making progress. In 2011, the literacy rate in India increased by 8 per cent to 73 per cent, compared with 64.8 per cent in 2001.

Gender disparities remain deeply engrained, with 28 nations across the developing world having nine or fewer girls in school for every 10 boys. By 2015, 56 million primary school age children will still be out of school.

Girls' education is critically linked to self-determination, improved health, social and economic status as well as positive health outcomes for the mother and the child. Yet girls still account for 55 per cent of the out-of-school population. Education is important for women's empowerment.

## **Violence against women and girls**

As many as one in three women worldwide will experience violence at some point in their lives, which can lead to unwanted pregnancy and abortion, among other things. This is a challenge in the twenty-first century.

Maternal deaths and pregnancy-related conditions cannot be eliminated without the empowerment of women. Maternal mortality is the number one cause of death for adolescents 15-19 years old and, in many countries, sexual and reproductive health services tend to focus exclusively on married women and ignore the needs of adolescent girls and unmarried women.

The empowerment of women, including ensuring access to health information and control of resources, such as money, is important for achieving gender equality and health equity. However, the ratio of female to male earned income is well below parity in all countries for which data is available.

The Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict noted that, it is still largely “cost-free” to rape a woman, child or man in conflict. He stated that, for the first time in history, we can reverse this reality, but that it will require leadership, political courage and a relentless determination to match the cold, calculating brutality of those who rape the innocent for military or political gain.

In June 2013, in its resolution [2106 \(2013\)](#), the Security Council recognized that a more consistent, rigorous investigation and prosecution of sexual violence crimes committed against women, particularly in war, are central to deterrence and prevention. The message was that rape and other forms of sexual violence in conflict will not be tolerated and impunity ended.

All Governments should uphold the statement of the Secretary-General that there is one universal truth, applicable to all countries, cultures and communities: violence against women is never acceptable, never excusable, never tolerable.

The organization recommends that the United Nations and Member States adopt the following actions:

- Implement Security Council resolutions [1325 \(2000\)](#), [1820 \(2008\)](#), [1888 \(2009\)](#), [1889 \(2009\)](#), [1960 \(2010\)](#) and [2106 \(2013\)](#) for the prevention of all forms of violence against girls and women
- Eradicate the root causes of poverty to stop human trafficking, child marriage and other social evils
- Promote women’s empowerment through access to education and economic development
- Promote women’s leadership, including participation in all decision-making bodies
- Promote ways in which men can be engaged to promote gender equality and to contribute more to their own health and that of their families and communities
- Provide gender-responsive policies and programmes

## Conclusion

The progress of a country depends not only on its gross domestic product. As Mahatma Gandhi said, “You can judge a society by how they treat their women”. The participation and utilization of the full potential of women are essential not only for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals but also for the realization of sustainable development. It is imperative that there be a paradigm shift away from a culture and attitude founded in patriarchy, which is the main cause of violence against women. We need to work together to rebalance power relations for justice and human rights by a joint effort by Governments, civil society and religious groups.

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*Note:* Statement is endorsed by the following non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Council: Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, Company of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, Dominican Leadership Conference, Edmund Rice International, Maryknoll Sisters of St. Dominic, Partnership for Global Justice, Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary, Salesian Missions, The Grail, Temple of Understanding and VIVAT International.