



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
6 December 2013

Original: English

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 Wales Assembly of Women, 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

Wales and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland are not immune from poverty or violence.

Across the world, uneven progress has been made and focus paid towards achieving gender equality. While there has been significant progress in developing regions in reducing gender gaps in primary school attendance, women's empowerment and equality, this remains a huge global issue. Despite the fact that women and girls comprise 51 per cent of the global population, they disproportionately carry the burden of poverty, inequality and injustice. A huge disparity is still apparent and, though developing nations are often at the heart of the poverty crisis, developed nations are also suffering.

It is vitally important that women's situations are reflected in a specific goal in order to ensure that women's and girls' rights are not subsumed under a wider or more general goal on inequalities.

This should not only be a stand-alone aim. The Wales Assembly of Women therefore welcomes and supports the concluding observation of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women on the examination of the United Kingdom in July 2013, in which it called for the integration of a gender perspective in accordance with the provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in all efforts aimed at the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals as well as in the new development framework as of 2015.

Equally, Wales Assembly of Women supports the calls to resolutely promote gender equality and eliminate the range of impediments to women and girls' empowerment in our societies. It is imperative that efforts, resources and investments to eliminate gender inequality are targeted, specific and adequately funded and of course must include actions to eliminate violence against women.

Poverty and its effects on women in Wales

Concerns have been raised by evidence from developed countries that the gender pay gap has increased in the current economic climate. These concerns are particularly troubling in large parts of Wales, where poverty and gender discrimination are more rampant than many other parts of the United Kingdom, thus disenfranchising women disproportionately. Indeed, large parts of Wales are still among the most deprived areas in the entire European Union, including the newer member States. The effects of the recession have been devastating on large parts of Wales, especially as a much higher proportion of public sector jobs have been lost than in many other parts of the United Kingdom, decimating whole regions of Wales.

Using the European Union methodology for measuring poverty, that is, if a household has an income of less than 60 per cent of the national average, it can be seen that 21 per cent of Wales is in poverty. This figure means that the following live in poverty in Wales:

- Nineteen per cent of families with children
- Thirty per cent of single women in childless households

- Forty-eight per cent of single parent families (90 per cent of which are headed by a woman)
- Eighteen per cent of women-led single pensioner households

It is predominantly women who are suffering from the effects of poverty in Wales. In 2012, Women's Poverty Matters found that recent changes in legislation by the Government of the United Kingdom to revise the benefits system in order to reduce cost, suggested that payment of family and children's benefits should be payable to only one person in the household. This will probably not be the woman, making it that much more difficult to manage on less money. Gender equality can regress as well as progress. The continuous budget cuts have hit Wales very hard and have led to thousands of redundancies and to an increase in part-time work replacing full-time, which reduces costs for employers and income for the women who form the majority of part-time workers.

But poverty is not simply an economic issue; women in Wales and across the world are suffering from limited opportunities for education and employment, inferior health status and structural impediments to social inclusion and empowerment.

Health

Women in Wales share common concerns with all women around the world when it comes to health and the provision of care. This can be illustrated by numerous examples, a few of which are listed below.

Wales has a high percentage of population aged over 65, the majority of whom are women. It also has, in some areas, a lower life expectancy. As elsewhere, women are living longer than men, and in many cases their pension levels are, on average, low. There is a danger of malnutrition, exacerbated by fuel poverty. Recent budget reductions to local government, health and social services will create additional risks, especially for those living alone. Strokes and falls are well known as justifying permanent provision of medical, therapeutic and caring services.

Public health bodies in Wales are working with local health boards to take action to reduce the rate of teenage conception. With access to contraception in appropriate cases and given the need for abortion services, the adoption of sex education in our school curricula is fully justified. For the period 2007-2009, 7.3 per cent of all conceptions were in the under-16 age group; over half were terminated. Standards of maternity care are of prime importance; many women wish to see the training of more midwives given priority in order to address the shortfall. Wales has a high rate of female breast cancer. There are many more issues that are at stake in a tighter and tighter spending climate. For Wales, being one of the poorest areas in the United Kingdom, this has devastating effects on women.

Violence against women

Wales Assembly of Women welcomes the aim of preventing and eliminating all forms of violence against girls and women.

The prevalence of violence against women remains unacceptably high everywhere in the world, including Wales.

The Wales Violence against Women Action Group points out that:

- One in four women in Wales will experience violence at the hands of a partner during their lives, and 150,000 women in Wales will suffer some form of gender-based violence each year
- Of all nations and regions in England and Wales, Wales has the highest percentage rate of partner violence: 7.1 per cent of adults in Wales reported non-sexual violence by a partner in 2005-2006. It is also highest for family non-sexual violence (4.8 per cent) and sexual assault (3.8 per cent)
- About 70 per cent of female murder victims are killed by their male partners, with domestic violence the leading cause of death for women aged 19-44
- A total of 32 cases of forced marriage were dealt with by South Wales Police in 2008. The United Kingdom Forced Marriage Unit received reports of 1,600 possible cases in 2008, with 85 per cent female victims and 39 per cent involving children under 18 years of age
- A total of 91 per cent of victims of domestic violence are women, with fewer than 3 in 10 domestic violence incidents reported to police resulting in conviction — only 1 in 4 incidents are even recorded
- Domestic violence accounts for more death and ill-health than cancer or traffic accidents in Europe
- On average, a victim of domestic violence is assaulted 35 times before her first call to the police
- In a recent study of 251 female sex workers over the age of 14, 57 per cent experienced gender-based violence over an 18-month period. Almost 40 per cent of the women had experienced physical violence; a quarter had been raped
- Domestic abuse and violence against women is hugely costly

Living free from violence or the threat of violence is a right, not a privilege. It is the State's obligation to fulfil it. This is true for all States that ratify any human rights treaty or convention that provides for the right to life and integrity of the person. No State can abdicate this absolute obligation towards its citizens.

We must fully confront all of these challenges for all the women and girls in the world.

Women who are safe, healthy, educated, and fully empowered to realize their potential transform their families, their communities, their economies and their societies. As the end of 2015 comes ever closer, it is imperative that we recognize that the aims and values of the Millennium Development Goals must be sustained and accelerated in order to combat gender inequality and empower women on a global scale.

The Wales Assembly of Women was set up in 1984 so that women in Wales could be represented at the United Nations global conferences, attend meetings of the Commission on the Status of Women and participate in the process of scrutinizing State party reports by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.