



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
9 November 2016

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women

Sixty-first session

13-24 March 2017

Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”

Statement submitted by Legiao 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.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

We, from the Legião da Boa Vontade/Legion of Good Will, have been able to promote the economic empowerment of women in the world of work, despite the various social obstacles that exist. Hence, based on our practical experience, our proposal will be presented in four main topics: social protection, qualifications, basic education, and the media.

Founded in Rio de Janeiro on January 1, 1950 (World Peace Day), we comprise a network of organizations that extend to seven countries (Brazil, Argentina, Bolivia, Paraguay, Portugal, the United States, and Uruguay). The almost one hundred units assist hundreds of thousands of people every year through our programs that offer social assistance, education, and health, as well as fostering universal, ethical, and Ecumenical Spirituality values.

From the premise that the pace of change on the planet is speeding up, it is essential to implement means of strengthening female participation in the preparation and execution of the sustainable development agenda of countries. In the message entitled “The Millennium of Women,” which gathers some of our main proposals on gender equality, our President, José de Paiva Netto, communicator and educator, says:

“There is no better financier than the mother of a family, a housewife, who has to make do with her often tiny budget and perform veritable miracles, of which we, from the most influential Minister of Finance to the simplest citizen, are all witnesses. Women’s actions are fundamental above all in the field of economics, which cannot be caught committing the serious crime of forgetting the spirit of Solidarity. Mohammad Ali Jinnah (1876-1948), jurist, politician, and founder of Pakistan, in a speech he made in 1944 at the Muslim University Union, stressed: ‘No nation can rise to the height of glory unless women are side by side with you.’”

In a previous part of this same article Paiva Netto states:

“It is urgent to strengthen an ecumenism that crosses barriers, appeases hatred, promotes an exchange of experience that instigates global creativity, corroborating the value of socio-humanitarian cooperation among partnerships as, for example, in popular cooperatives in which women play a key role, highlighting the fact that they are completely against waste. There is a lot to learn from each other. The opposite of that is undoubtedly the path of violence, brutality, wars, which have invaded homes around the world. Alziro Zarur (1914-1979), late founder of the Legion of Good Will, used to emphasize that battles for Good require bravery. Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986), French writer, philosopher, and feminist, got it right when she stated that: ‘All success cloaks a surrender.’”

Among the social technologies we undertake based on this view are those that provide social support for families. Generally speaking, it is the women who are solely responsible for caring for children and family members who are disabled, whether because of an illness or disease, severe disabilities or advanced age. When they are unable to reconcile their professional and domestic activities, they are obliged to stop working outside the home, or seek informal employment, which reduces the family income and makes them even more vulnerable. We consider it essential to promote female economic empowerment in each one of the main topics below:

Topic 1 — Social protection

To expand access to early childhood education and full-time education (for children) and o homes or community centres (for adults and the elderly who are highly dependent).

Scenario

Most of the families we monitor are single-parent families and headed exclusively by a woman. Latin America invests little in early childhood (age 0-5 years) according to the study “The Early Years: Child Well-being and the Role of Public Policy,” carried out by the Inter-American Development Bank. The text reveals that children in this phase receive three times less investment than those between the ages of 6 and 11. The result: there is a lack of vacancies in early childhood education.

Our strategies

We have a network of free schools with full-time education for children in their early childhood.

We train teachers who work in this crucial phase of human development.

Our programs Children: The Future in the Present! and Youth: The Future in the Present! provide both ludic and educational activities during out-of-school hours for children and teenagers living in social vulnerability, while members of their families are monitored and supported by a multidisciplinary social team. Thus, boys and girls are protected while they are not in school, considering that regular school lessons only last half a day.

We raise the awareness of children, teenagers, and young people to the mechanisms that exist for them to be able to defend their rights. We help them avoid a series of risks, such as being enticed by networks that exploit child labour, prostitution, and human trafficking. We place special emphasis on this work in the northeast of Brazil, a region with a lot of tourism potential and, unfortunately, worrying indicators of sexual exploitation and trafficking of young boys and girls.

With the support of our partners, we invested US\$ 230,000 in buying and refurbishing buses to transport children, young people, and elderly people safely to our facilities in those places where local government does not provide this service. This is because it is not always possible to be inside the communities, due to lack of even a minimal infrastructure, or of legalized plots of land available for us to use, or because of high levels of violence.

We have homes for the elderly who are highly dependent and have no family ties. These units are also used from Monday to Friday by elderly people who live with their families.

We offer socialization services for the third age in our social service centres, thereby removing them from their isolation and helping them and their families deal with the challenges of growing old.

All these strategies allow thousands of women who are prevented from becoming professionally fulfilled because of their circumstances to start a business or obtain paid employment.

Topic 2 — Work qualifications

To promote training for women living in social vulnerability, we aim to achieve their immediate inclusion in the world of work.

Our strategies

We have a Skills-building Training and Productive Inclusion program for adult females, which provides digital inclusion, workshops on entrepreneurship, and specific courses of local demands.

We undertake the Good Will Apprentice program for teenagers and young people. This is carried out in partnership with the companies that hire them and complies with specific Brazilian legislation that allows for reserved vacancies of a reduced working day for these teenagers and young people. The program also includes personal and professional development activities, as well as tasks that are appropriate to this particular training process.

In our professional qualification programs, we deal with gender issues, which prepares the participants to recognize and face up to situations of discrimination and/or sexual harassment.

Topic 3 — Basic education

To prepare young girls and teenagers for professions of the future right from the early years of education.

Our strategies

To awaken in all the students an interest in mathematics and other scientific subjects from a very early age, thus combating the gender stereotypes that are associated with these professions, which generally link the most valued careers to the male world.

To foster a critical, citizenly, and solidary awareness along with developing academic work. More details on this topic you will find in “Our educational proposal.”

Success story

Our female students learn from an early age that they can, and should, pursue the professions they have their hearts set on, even high positions in companies and politics, regardless of their gender. For example, most of our students selected for the Brazilian Math Olympics because of their high performance are females. Promoted by the Brazilian Mathematical Society, the competition involves 4,000 schools and 564,000 students. The subject is being taken so seriously that a series of initiatives is underway in Brazil to increase the presence of females in the area of math and in similar fields. These initiatives involve the participation of the most renowned Brazilian universities, such as the University of São Paulo and the University of Campinas.

Topic 4 — Media

To deal with gender equality in the media in a broad way.

Our strategies

We produce content for radio, TV, and the Internet that aims to raise awareness about gender equality. For example, a large part of the Brazilian population is unaware that the Maria da Penha Law provides for punishment for economic abuse, which is understood as a form of gender violence, or that public housing and income transfer programs prioritize women. This is important content that helps women protect themselves economically.

Our educational proposal

We have our own educational method, formed by the Pedagogy of Affection (for children up to 10 years old) and the Ecumenical Citizen Pedagogy (for young people, adults, and the elderly), which was created by educator Paiva Netto. This teaching proposal is based on the idea that not only the biological, psychological, and social aspect of the individual should be considered, but also their spiritual dimension, or in other words, their transcendental dimension. Hence the relevant role played by reflecting on ethical, ecumenical, and spiritual values.

In practical terms this proposal translates into a special school curriculum, which establishes thematic units that permeate all subjects. These thematic topics are defined according to the characteristics of each age group and deal directly with contemporary issues, like combating racial and gender discrimination. The teaching proposal also has its own methodology, which centres on research and values the cognitive, emotional, and intuitive potential of the students.

Conclusion

We understand that countless measures need to be discussed and adopted in order to eradicate the historical gender inequality, among which the creation of affirmative policies and work opportunities, equal salaries for men and women, and valuing professions that are traditionally practiced by women (such as an elderly caregiver), for example, a profession that is growing in the current demographic context).

Therefore, we believe that complete gender equality will only be achieved if we act, above all, in favour of a profound change in the social paradigm, as argued by Paiva Netto in *Reflections and Thoughts — The Dialectic of Good Will* (1987):

“In our point of view, women have the right to be Head of State, a religious leader, a captain of industry, of airplanes, of transatlantic liners; they have the right to be a doctor, an engineer, a teacher ... There is a fair concept of value between men and women at work: their competence. So, in this respect the genders will be in harmony. Let men shine, let women shine, each according to their own competence. This does not mean that men and women are totally equal. Initially, there is at least the anatomy to deny this. What I mean is that old barriers should not be sustained and new ones must not be raised, based on taboos, prejudice, and spurious interests in order to prevent women from having greater influence over the destiny of the world. Men and women depend on one another. They complete each other.”