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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 Fundación para Estudio e Investigación de la Mujer, 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

There is solid evidence that violence against women is a leading factor in the increasing “feminization” of the HIV epidemic globally. Women and girls who are subjected to gender-based violence, and particularly intimate-partner violence, face a higher risk of acquiring HIV. Gender inequalities that result in power imbalances in intimate, family and social relationships interact with other variables, such as age, income, education, ethnicity and sexual orientation, to exacerbate women’s subordination and vulnerability to gender-based violence and coercion and to HIV. For example, threats or acts of violence and coercion reduce women’s ability to negotiate condom use or refuse sex even in intimate relationships. These risks women and girls face are increased by their greater biological vulnerability to acquire HIV through sexual transmission.

Gender-based violence is not only a cause of HIV in women, but also a consequence; women living with HIV are particularly vulnerable to such violence in their family and community contexts, where they face additional layers of stigma and discrimination owing to their gender and serostatus.

As a result of these intersecting factors, women and girls bear the brunt of the twin epidemics of gender-based violence and HIV, both of which affect their ability to exercise their rights, including the right to the highest attainable standard of health. The links between the two epidemics are undeniable and the effects of their interrelation continue to threaten the lives of millions of women and girls around the world.

The impact of both violence against women and HIV is exacerbated by inadequate services and failure to protect sexual and reproductive health and rights; punitive or discriminatory laws that negatively impact women and people living with HIV and AIDS; social and community standards that validate gender inequality and the subordination of women; and the forms of multiple discrimination faced by women and girls because of their economic status, ethnicity, sexuality and other factors.

Despite growing attention to women’s empowerment, including the need to address the intersection of violence against women and HIV, programming in these areas faces chronic underfunding by Governments, bilateral and multilateral agencies and major donors, which still tend to address both issues separately and insufficiently. This is a principal obstacle to the realization of women’s rights and health.

To pursue the implementation of comprehensive, rights-based approaches for the prevention and elimination of all forms of gender-based violence and HIV/AIDS in women and girls, we urge Governments and donors to take the following steps:

- (a) Scale up investment and resources for effective programmes for the empowerment of women and girls and the prevention and elimination of all forms of violence among women and girls and HIV;
- (b) Take concrete actions to comprehensively address intersecting social determinants that increase women’s and girls’ vulnerability to these twin pandemics, such as poverty, women’s subordination to men, and social norms that reinforce gender inequality;

(c) Guarantee the provision of an essential package of violence prevention and care services and sexual and reproductive health-care services for women and girls, including screening for violence against women, care protocols for survivors of all forms of violence, and access to post-exposure prophylaxis to prevent HIV infection, emergency contraception and safe abortion;

(d) Develop comprehensive care protocols for victims of all forms of violence, including sexual violence. These protocols must ensure legal and social assessment and support;

(e) Activities for prevention, care and support for victims of violence against women must become an essential part of the HIV/AIDS response. This includes guaranteeing comprehensive and inclusive services that address the lifelong needs of women and girls in all their diversity to ensure full protection of their human rights, including sexual and reproductive rights and the right to live a life free from all forms of violence, coercion, stigma and discrimination;

(f) Create and strengthen mechanisms for a unified register of information on violence against women at the national level, including its link to HIV, in order to generate evidence-based, effective policies addressing this epidemic and its intersection with HIV in women and girls;

(g) Ensure full access for all women and girls to information and education about HIV and violence against women and their intersection, including comprehensive sexuality education, in safe and empowering spaces both in and out of schools;

(h) Promote the meaningful participation of women living with HIV and all women's rights organizations and networks in reporting to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and related processes at the national and international levels. This will help to address cross-cutting issues, such as the link between violence against women and HIV in women and girls, that often go unaddressed.
