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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 International Federation of University 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

Violence against women and girls is a global human rights injustice, occurring in every culture, race, religion and socioeconomic group. It takes many forms, including domestic violence, sexual harassment or assault, dowry-related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation, female sexual slavery, incest, honour crimes, sexual abuse of girls, and female infanticide or abortion of female fetuses. Violence against women is defined by the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women as “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering of women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life”. The International Federation of University Women would like to emphasize that that this definition should be extended to include the girl child.

As stated in the World Health Organization (WHO) Multi-country Study on Women’s Health and Domestic Violence against Women, forms of gender violence are not fixed but are dependent on circumstances or cultures, and are too often justified in the name of culture, tradition or religion. Such interpretations are based on unequal legislation, which restricts women’s choices and supports violence and harmful traditional practices.

Milestones in combating violence against women and girls

As the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women do not include violence against women in their final texts, two general recommendations have been developed by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. In addition, the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women was adopted in 1993 and the first Special Rapporteur on violence against women was appointed in 1994.

Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security and subsequent resolutions 1820 (2008), 1888 (2009), 1889 (2009) and 1960 (2010) emphasize the obligation to protect women and girls in armed conflicts. International criminal tribunals and the International Criminal Court have addressed violence against women and girls in their work. However, fewer than 40 States Members of the United Nations have completed their National Action Plan to date, as required under Council resolution 1325 (2000).

Current status of women subjected to gender-based violence

Gender-based violence denies women and young girls their rights to dignity, life, freedom, harmony and equality. Worldwide, one in three women has experienced violence and one in five women has experienced sexual violence in her lifetime. According to the World Bank, acts of violence against women between the ages of 15 and 44 cause more deaths and disabilities than cancer, malaria, traffic accidents and war combined. About 9 million disability-adjusted life years are lost annually to intimate partner violence.

The WHO Multi-Country Study notes that 15-71 per cent (with the majority of results falling between 29 and 62 per cent) of married or cohabitating non-married women are likely to experience physical or sexual violence, or both, by an intimate

partner in their lifetime. Honour killing and infanticide are examples of culturally affirmed acts of violence against women.

Violence against women and girls and HIV/AIDS are deeply rooted in gender discrimination, inextricably intertwined and mutually reinforcing. HIV-positive women are nearly three times as likely as HIV-negative women to have experienced violence at the hands of their partner; the number is even higher among young women.

Although there is greater awareness of gender-based violence, actual acts of violence remain unpunished. Communities fail to provide justice for victims of gender-based violence because of lack of commitment, political will and resources to address gender-based violence; because domestic abuse is considered a domestic or private matter rather than a crime; and because cases are not reported, withdrawn or concealed out of economic need, fear or shame.

Violence against women in conflict situations

Violence during wars and internal conflicts occurs not only during encounters with armies, but is used as a means of terrorizing the population. Rape is often used as a psychological weapon to repress the enemy. For the women concerned the situation is intolerable; as Governments become embroiled and preoccupied with war, the plight of victims raped during the conflict is neglected.

Education as an instrument to end violence and abuse against women and girls

Increased access to secondary or higher education and human rights education should be promoted to combat violence against women and girls. Although the number of girls in primary education is rising, primary education is not enough. Women's empowerment through education is vital to sustainable development and the realization of human rights for all.

Various studies have found that there is a correlation between higher education and lower risk of intimate partner violence, although the protective effect only appears once women have received secondary education. Studies also show that women with primary education are more likely to be at risk of intimate partner violence than women with secondary or higher education, and women with no education are less likely to report violence or are culturally trained to accept violence.

Unfortunately, young girls are often targets of sexual violence in school, which can affect their education and self-confidence. School should be a safe haven, not another environment where women are exploited.

Educated women can also be vulnerable to violence, as demonstrated in studies that show that women with more education than their partners are often at higher risk of violence. This is also the case for women whose partners are unemployed or have less education. Violence is often used in the household to maintain the power structure when other resources or means are unavailable.

Recommendations

The International Federation of University Women makes the following recommendations for advancing gender equality and eradicating violence against women.

Obstacles to women's empowerment should be eliminated by:

(a) Promoting representation in decision-making and access to education and employment opportunities in order to eradicate structural gender inequalities and behavioural and cultural attitudes that perpetuate violence;

(b) Eradicating structural gender inequalities, behaviours and cultural attitudes that perpetuate violence;

(c) Addressing violence against women and girls in a holistic manner, rather than separately at the policy and programme levels. Significant changes are also required to end violence against women and girls in the context of HIV/AIDS.

The access of girls and women to secondary and higher education should be increased through policies and programmes to encourage girls to stay in school and by providing financial support and removing obstacles.

Interactive, age- and gender-sensitive human rights education, using a holistic approach, should be encouraged to promote violence-free behaviour together with a greater awareness of human rights, in order to help change cultural attitudes. Human rights education should be included in curricula at all educational levels, together with teacher education. Human rights non-governmental organizations can support schools in providing human rights education.

Programmes should be developed that include men and boys and engage them as key partners and champions.

Governments should provide safe refuges for women in immediate physical danger, as well as continuing support systems for women and children. Lifeline-style telephones should be installed to provide immediate supportive advice.

Law enforcement should be aligned with family services, which should be provided with proper funding, for the investigation of domestic violence and abuse. Laws that protect women against violence and abuse should be enforced. There should be specialized courts with national jurisdiction and specially trained personnel for cases of domestic and conflict violence and abuse, rape, honour killings and infanticide.
