



## Economic and Social Council

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### Commission on the Status of Women

#### Fifty-seventh session

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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 New Future Foundation, 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**

### **Eradicate and eliminate violent acts against women and girls and empower victims and survivors**

Violence in any form is a breach of human rights. Violence against women and girls is an epidemic that generates additional facets of sexism, racism and ageism, in addition to discrimination on the basis of religion, political and/or any other opinion, cultural/ethnic differences and socioeconomic status. It fosters male dominance, intimidation, fear, power and control. In order to create a world that totally eliminates and prevents those components, we must focus on them directly. Violence against women and girls has been an evolving issue. It is imperative that States be more diligent in their enforcement of existing laws and policies, acknowledge where gaps exist and proactively create policies that address those gaps. In addition to evaluating existing policies, new forms of behaviour and attitudes must empower both females and males to develop innovative ways to address all forms of violence. Finally, all efforts to prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls will be futile without the formulation and execution of action plans that hold the accused and/or States liable for such horrendous acts of violence, both big and small.

#### **Primary prevention**

Violence against women and girls requires greater focus on responsibility. Prevention starts by acknowledging that violence against women and girls is a severe problem with a multitude of tentacles that must be approached in a manner that is culturally driven, holistic and integrated. Creating safe havens for women to freely express themselves, without judgement, ridicule and negative reactions to their experiences, ideologies, education, work, freedom of speech and philosophies, is just the beginning of what will be necessary to create a foundation for prevention. Open, honest and candid communication is also crucial.

Providing a platform and allowing women and girls exposure to education and knowledge about prevention, so as to detect potential signs of aggression as early as possible, will ensure that obstacles are put in the way of violence and soon eliminate violence entirely. Women must be protected by States and granted political asylum to preserve their human rights to live decent lives and to flourish. This will break the brutal cycle of violence. Avoidance only increases the problem, allowing tolerance with no punitive action taken against the accused. No matter the type of violence, the sharing of experiences by victims is useful for young girls. These sessions can be used as a way of detecting warning signs to prevent other similar cases. Access to information raises awareness. Allowing those who have encountered, are encountering and/or will encounter a violent act against them to express themselves provides productive resolutions. We must keep in mind that these preventive measures present a challenge, given that many women still live in fear of the repercussions of speaking out and/or becoming proactive.

#### **Multi-sectoral approach**

Violence against women and girls has grown into a systemic problem, going beyond domestic violence, rape, trafficking and verbal or physical abuse, among other forms. Violence has taken on a new form, where blatant disrespect and cruelty

is seen. The media and other members of society have a crucial role in this regard, just as threats of being cast out, labelled, shamed or disgraced for either speaking up and/or standing out haunt women. While these sentiments shift from culture to culture, it is important that we craft and help to support an approach that no longer stigmatizes women who have become victims and/or survivors. As stated at a side event organized by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women on 25 October 2012, many of these atrocities take place in the home. Thus, it can be inferred that men tend to be aggressors, oppressors and perpetrators of violent acts. Females and/or children, having less power, live in fear and are usually the oppressed. Unfortunately, at times, they themselves act as suppressors, condemning others and preventing them from speaking about these occurrences.

A multi-sectoral approach would mean more involvement by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, granting political asylum in countries that offer protection to women seeking freedom from all forms of violence. This would begin to build a sanctuary to progressively move towards a world where all forms of violence against women and girls are completely eliminated. Women and girls need to be given the freedom to speak and share their experiences without condemnation: freedom from fear needs to be safeguarded.

### **Responses for victims/survivors**

Protection is key to preventing behaviour from being glorified. A 15-year-old girl from Pakistan, Malala Yousafzai, was shot in the head by Taliban rebels because she exhibited strength and courage in speaking out about education. The outpouring of support and love was overwhelming. She received high-quality treatment in the best facilities of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland for the injuries incurred as a result of her outstanding demonstration of bravery. Many are calling for her to receive the Nobel Peace Prize. The Secretary-General declared 10 November 2012 “Malala Day”. The former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom and current Special Envoy for Global Education, Gordon Brown, has launched a petition in her name. Ms. Yousafzai was targeted for her thoughts and aspiration of being an educated young girl and for influencing others to make their mark in society and be strong and speak out. Others like her feel the same yet live in fear of being placed in harm’s way and of becoming a victim of violence. When it comes to responding to victims/survivors, the response sets the tone and the precedent. Any response must be smart and calculated, given that it may be detrimental and/or beneficial and will affect future choices for others.

### **Equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS**

States have the main responsibility to ensure the safety and security of all their citizens, providing immediate care and attention to victims. Given that violence against women and girls is primarily perpetrated by men, it is expected that the HIV virus is transferred in this manner as well. The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS states that violence against women and girls is a cause and consequence of the spread of HIV. Violence and the threat of violence hamper women’s ability to protect themselves from HIV infection and/or to assert healthy sexual decision-making. The proportion of women who have experienced physical or sexual violence, or both, by an intimate partner in their lifetime ranges from 15 per

cent to 71 per cent. The prevalence of forced first sex among adolescent girls younger than 15 years ranges between 11 per cent and 48 per cent globally.

In the United States of America, violence against women is a significant problem. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, women who have experienced sexual abuse may be more likely than women with no abuse history to use drugs as a coping mechanism, have difficulty refusing unwanted sex, exchange sex for drugs or engage in high-risk sexual activities. As a group, women accounted for 23 per cent of estimated new HIV infections in 2009 and 25 per cent of those living with HIV in 2008. At some point in her lifetime, 1 in 139 women will be diagnosed with HIV infection. African American and Latino women incur a higher risk of infection. Women accounted for more than 25 per cent of the estimated 34,247 AIDS diagnoses in 2009 and represent nearly 20 per cent of cumulative AIDS diagnoses (including children) in the United States to date.

Men must be at the forefront and accountable for their actions. Counselling on all levels for the accused, for victims and between men and women, as well as direct sessions involving male children from an early age, can also increase equal sharing of responsibilities.

### **Recommendations**

Violent acts against women and girls can be eradicated, and victims and survivors empowered, by:

- (a) Creating a safe and secure environment, out of harm's way, where victims can discuss, share and listen, free from predators;
- (b) Implementing self-defence courses and training, in addition to education and technology courses;
- (c) Inducting more women into Government employment in decision-making positions;
- (d) Prosecuting States, making them more responsible for violence against women and girls;
- (e) Putting pressure on States to be more interactive and involved in legal processes seeking justice for victims and holding perpetrators accountable for violent acts against women and girls;
- (f) Recognizing cultural differences and finding ways to address them, in addition to involving and informing male children, from an early age, that violence against women is wrong in any form;
- (g) Encouraging global cultural partnerships that help to spread more diverse images of women, in addition to promoting study abroad programmes;
- (h) Using best practices from civil society, non-governmental organizations, Member States and individuals;
- (i) Becoming more involved in the artistic outlets for self-expression of music, painting, drawing and dancing.

As women strengthen the power of their thoughts and actions in the world, the world too must be responsive to women's needs, wants and humanity. It is vital that we continue to listen and respond accordingly to ensure an effective future for young people and to train their minds about the unacceptable behaviour of violence against women and girls.

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