



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
29 November 2012

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women

Fifty-seventh session

4-15 March 2013

**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 Awaz Centre for Development Services, 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

Pakistan is the least gender-sensitive country in the South Asian subcontinent and in the world. It is one of the countries in the world where men outnumber women. The sex ratio is 52 men to every 48 women. Today Pakistan is facing an intense social crisis, including rampant corruption, bad governance, rising poverty, lack of energy, water scarcity, devastating floods, rising extremism and intolerance that manifests itself in the sharp rise in the molestation of women, gang rape and violent crimes against women and young girls, both in the rural and urban areas.

In Pakistan, women are not only subjected to political and financial discrimination, but they are also victims of inhuman customs, such as *karo-kari* (a form of honour killing), *vani* (women/young girls/girl children are given in penance for a crime committed by a male family member or any relative), *watta satta* (exchange of brides between families) and early marriages. Women are the victims of discriminatory laws such as *haddood* and *qasas* (laws based on misinterpretation of the Holy Quran) ordinances, whereby in court the testimony of a female witness is worth only half that of a male witness.

In the rural areas, women are like slaves, subjected to drudgery. They exist just to obey their fathers, brothers and husbands. They do not have the right to decide anything for themselves because, according to the dominant social and cultural norms, women are considered to be foolish creatures. Marriage, in both the rural and urban areas, is a sort of trade between different families. Women are highly vulnerable to violation of their right to life.

Woman's right to liberty is restricted in the name of modesty, protection and prevention of immoral activity. In rural areas 90 per cent of women work in the fields. They work for the whole day along with their male family members, but still have to face their wrath. Women are considered possessions; a form of property. Not only are the restrictions of women's liberty maintained in the name of honour (*ghairat*), but they can be put to death if they lose it. According to the Awaz Centre for Development Services database unit, more than 9,800 cases of violence against women were recorded in the year 2011, including 678 reported cases of honour killings and 1,254 reported cases of domestic violence. Only 3 per cent of women exercise their right to inheritance in Pakistan and 1.3 per cent of women in southern districts of Punjab exercise their right to inherit. A great number of young girls are facing forced marriages because of fear of losing family wealth, property and land. Therefore, their right to choose a life partner is also denied. It is pertinent to mention that only 30 per cent of cases of violence against women and young girls are reported because of the fear of shaming the family.

This violence against women begins in their childhood. They are not allowed to play games like boys to help in their mental and physical development. Another practice common in Pakistan is cutting off a woman's nose if she is suspected of having an extramarital relationship. Sexual assaults on women, including rape, remain one of the most common crimes; however, no estimate can be made of the numerous cases that go unreported. Acid burnings are among the most horrific crimes against women in Pakistan. A landmark set of laws has been passed by the parliament which stand to protect millions of women from the common forms of abuse in a conservative, Muslim country with a terrible history of gender inequality.

It is encouraging to note that an enabling policy environment has been created by the Government of Pakistan by introducing laws related to the socioeconomic and political empowerment of women. The new laws explicitly criminalize acid attacks and mandate that convicted attackers serve a minimum sentence of 14 years, which could extend to life, and pay a minimum fine of about \$11,200. Other new laws mandate a minimum prison sentence of three years for forcing a woman to marry, including to settle tribal disputes; five years for preventing a woman from inheriting property; and three years for a practice known as “marriage to the Holy Quran”.

Women are discriminated against in other ways as well. Pakistan ranked third to last in the World Economic Forum *Global Gender Gap Report 2011*, beating only Chad and Yemen. The report captures the magnitude of gender-based disparities in areas like health and education.

The gender insensitivity is so severe that from the cradle to the grave women are forced to lead their lives enduring discrimination. There are more infant deaths among girls than among boys. Every year 30,000 women die in childbirth in Pakistan. Only 21 per cent of women have access to medical facilities during childbirth.

Early marriages hamper children’s growth into healthy adults. They are not given a chance to make their own informed choice to enter into one of the most crucial relationships of their lives. It burdens them with the responsibilities of marital life at a time when they should be going to school or playing games. It leads to generational subjugation and control over women.

In Pakistan the issue of early marriages remains unaddressed and no measures are taken by the State to arrest this trend.

Women are generally low in the hierarchy of power, hence their rights to education, health care and proper nutrition are largely denied. Thus, as a result of lack of awareness on the part of both the rights holders and the duty bearers, access to sexual and reproductive health information remains limited. This is illustrated by the common occurrence of early marriages, early pregnancies, induced abortions and high maternal and infant mortality rates. Additionally, the absence of women-friendly policies and legislation and poor implementation of existing laws further lead to increased violence and little protection of women and adolescent girls, especially with regard to their sexual and reproductive health and rights. According to the Law Commission of Pakistan, 120 laws are discriminatory on the basis of gender, sex and religion. Similarly, the complex sociocultural beliefs and practices prevent women from participating in economic activities and being financially independent.

The foremost condition of women’s empowerment is education. According to the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), nearly 25 million children in Pakistan do not attend school. Though it is claimed by the Government that 83 girls for every 103 boys are enrolled at primary level, it is evident that less than 30 per cent of enrolled girl children complete their primary-level education. According to a study on the impact of early marriage on girls’ education conducted by Awaz Centre for Development Services, 7 per cent of girls leave before completing their secondary school education because of their engagement/marriage; 5 per cent of girls leave school after their first menstruation because the parents decide that they

must now stay within the four walls of the house. However, it is vital to understand that for sustainable development, improving the situation of adolescent girls is both a goal in itself as well as an instrument for reaching other goals, particularly those on gender equality, child mortality, maternal health and HIV/AIDS. Girls need to be taught about their social and reproductive health and rights; this is the key to discouraging inhumane practices in the society such as sexual and gender-based violence.

There is a proven positive correlation between education, age of marriage and reproductive health. Women with higher education are found to enter marriage later than those with a secondary education, conceive later, and are 10 times less likely to start early childbearing. There is also a dramatic increase in contraceptive use with women's education and their knowledge of HIV/AIDS, which is also less prevalent among educated women. Education will bring about social empowerment of women.

Investment in education must be a main priority in Pakistan. Furthermore, contextualized comprehensive sex education and reproductive health education must be part of the national education curriculum; this will empower adolescent girls as well as women, and in turn will ensure the fulfilment of Pakistan's obligation undertaken at the International Conference on Population and Development and enormous progress towards achieving Millennium Development Goal 2. Awaz Centre for Development Services appreciates the recent constitutional amendment (article 25 A) and law reform (The Right to Free and Compulsory Education Bill 2012) introduced by the Government of Pakistan to ensure education for all. It is expected that the federal and provincial Governments will implement it in letter and in spirit.
