



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 IOGT International, 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

In 2016, IOGT International celebrated its 165th anniversary. In our now 165-year long history of service in communities around the world, gender equality and women empowerment have always been a crucial focus for us. It's this perspective and understanding that makes us both hopeful and concerned. We are hopeful because we've seen considerable progress and vast achievements in gender equality and women empowerment. We are concerned because we face major challenges not only to the advances made but to the health and well-being of women and girls in general.

In September 2015, world leaders adopted 17 Sustainable Development Goals, including Sustainable Development Goal 5 "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls." The Agenda 2030 is a remarkable achievement. But envisioning its realization through the lens of women and girls, we clearly see massive obstacles looming. Alcohol harm is a cross-cutting obstacle for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, as it negatively impacts 12 out of 17 goals, including Sustainable Development Goal 5. Alcohol harm places a tremendous burden on women and girls, their health, their economic empowerment and their rights.

Going forward, it is therefore of utmost importance for the global community to address alcohol harm with the evidence-based, high-impact and cost-effective measures that we do have at our disposal. Women's economic empowerment is threatened and hindered by three major global epidemics: Non-communicable diseases, Tuberculosis and HIV/Aids, and Gender-based violence.

These three global epidemics are disproportionately burdening women and girls, especially women in low- and middle-income countries and they have one common risk factor: alcohol use.

Alcohol is one of four major risk factors in the global epidemic that are non-communicable diseases. Non-communicable diseases are the leading cause of death globally. A staggering 35 million people die every year from non-communicable diseases, of which 18 million are women. Non-communicable diseases represent the biggest threat to women's health worldwide, increasingly burdening women from developing countries in their most productive years — clearly an issue of concern in terms of women's economic empowerment.

Secondly, alcohol is also a risk factor in the global epidemic of gender-based violence. In some parts of the world, gender-based violence can be related to alcohol in up to 80% of the cases. And alcohol marketing plays a role in perpetuating prejudices and stereotypes of women; alcohol marketing often de-humanizes, sexualized and objectifies them. Alcohol marketing fuels gender-based violence and erodes women empowerment.

Thirdly, alcohol is a risk factor for Tuberculosis and HIV/ Aids. It increases the likelihood to engage in risky sexual behaviour — like unprotected sex, frequent change of partners or violent sex. Alcohol weakens the immune system making it more susceptible for the HI-Virus and it makes adherence to medication for people who are HIV-positive more difficult. In many aspects of the HIV/ Aids epidemic, women are disproportionately burdened.

Simply put: alcohol harm is a Women's Rights issue. Alcohol harm is a threat to women's economic empowerment.

That's the reality in which the discussion of women's economic empowerment needs to be rooted. This reality highlights the urgent need to apply the tools of high-impact and cost-effective alcohol policy in our joint efforts for women's economic empowerment. Alcohol policy measures, such as the Three Best Buys of alcohol policy as described by World Bank, World Health Organization and World Economic Forum (among others), can help foster transformative change for women and girls.

Alcohol policy measures such as alcohol taxation can play a powerful role in helping to end discrimination, to eliminate gender-based violence, and to strengthen sound policies comprehensively promoting gender equality and women empowerment.

We have the evidence. We have the policy tools. Now we need political will and leadership to create the momentum that the Agenda 2030 needs and that women and girls deserve.
