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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 Licht für die Welt — Christoffel Entwicklungszusammenarbeit, 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

Prevention of violence against girls and women with disabilities

Licht für die Welt — Christoffel Entwicklungszusammenarbeit is a European confederation of national development non-governmental organizations committed to saving eyesight, improving the quality of life and advocating the rights of persons with disabilities in the underprivileged regions of our world. Our work focuses on:

- (a) Preventing blindness and restoring eyesight;
- (b) Undertaking efforts to implement the right to rehabilitation and habilitation of persons with disabilities, particularly blind persons;
- (c) Preventing and treating disabling conditions;
- (d) Promoting the rights of persons with disabilities.

In paragraph 98 of her recent report (A/67/227), the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, Rashida Manjoo, recommends that States should ensure that the justice sector is responsive to and supportive of women with disabilities who report cases of violence and that United Nations agencies and programmes should be increasingly engaged in the issue of violence against women with disabilities.

Increased risk for girls and women with disabilities

In paragraph 32 of her report, the Special Rapporteur notes that women with disabilities are at high risk of violence based on social stereotypes and biases that attempt to dehumanize or infantilize, exclude or isolate them, and target them for sexual and other forms of violence. She further notes that violence also has the consequence of contributing to the incidence of disability among women.

In paragraph 31, she writes that violence against women with disabilities occurs in various spheres, including in the home, the community, as violence that is perpetrated and/or condoned by the State and as violence against women in the transnational sphere. She indicates that the forms of violence to which women with disabilities are subjected can be of a physical, psychological, sexual or financial nature and include neglect, social isolation, entrapment, degradation, detention, denial of health care, forced sterilization and psychiatric treatment.

In the same paragraph, she notes that women with disabilities are twice as likely to experience domestic violence as non-disabled women, and are likely to experience abuse over a longer period of time and to suffer more severe injuries as a result of the violence.

In addition, she notes that:

- (a) Women with disabilities are often treated as if they have no control, or should have no control, over their sexual and reproductive choices (para. 36);
- (b) In domestic violence situations, women with disabilities may fear reporting or leaving an abuser because of emotional, financial or physical dependence; they may also fear losing custody of their children (para. 34).

Commitments made

Licht für die Welt thus urges the Commission on the Status of Women to heed the commitments made under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Furthermore, Licht für die Welt would like to remind the Commission to take further action on the commitments made at the high-level segment of the substantive session of 2010 of the Economic and Social Council, held in New York from 28 June to 2 July 2010.

Multiple and aggravated forms of discrimination

At that segment, the participating ministers and heads of delegations emphasized the need for measures to ensure that women and girls with disabilities were not subject to multiple or aggravated forms of discrimination or excluded from participation in the implementation of the internationally agreed development goals and, in that regard, further emphasized the need to ensure their equal access to education at all levels, including technical and vocational training, and adequate rehabilitation programmes, health care and services and employment opportunities, to protect and promote all of their human rights and to eliminate existing inequalities between women and men with disabilities.

They also emphasized the need for a holistic approach to ending all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls across all sectors, including through initiatives designed to prevent and combat gender-based violence, to encourage and support efforts by men and boys to take an active part in the prevention and elimination of all forms of violence, especially gender-based violence, and to increase awareness of their responsibility in respect of ending the cycle of violence.

In a comprehensive submission to the United Nations analytical study on violence against women with disabilities, Women with Disabilities Australia rightly emphasized the importance of access to education (including human rights education), access to health-care services (including sexual and reproductive health care) and access to justice as important prevention measures.

Community-based rehabilitation

Community-based rehabilitation, which was defined by the International Labour Organization, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and the World Health Organization in 2004 as a strategy within general community development for rehabilitation, equalization of opportunities, poverty reduction and social inclusion of people with disabilities, plays an important role in violence prevention. The application of community-based rehabilitation is growing swiftly and is implemented through the combined efforts of persons with disabilities themselves, their families, organizations and communities and the relevant governmental and non-governmental health, education, vocational, social and other services.

Community-based rehabilitation is today understood as a strategy to promote the inclusion of, and rights and equal opportunities for, persons with disabilities. Community-based rehabilitation practice has changed from a medical-oriented,

often single-sector (e.g. health or education), service-delivery approach to a comprehensive, multi-sector, rights-based approach, focusing on the creation of inclusive societies where accessibility to all development benefits is ensured for persons with disabilities, just as all other persons in their communities.

The community roots of community-based rehabilitation, coupled with the participatory methodology, make for a good foundation to change attitudes and structures in a meaningful and sustainable fashion. Thus, stereotypes and prejudices, which increase the likelihood of experiencing violence, can significantly be reduced. Community-based rehabilitation takes a comprehensive approach, involving and working with all fields and aspects of life, such as education, health, social issues, livelihood and empowerment, thus contributing to violence protection.

Strengthening and empowering persons with disabilities and their representative organizations is a crucial element in the community-based rehabilitation methodology. It thus also contributes to women themselves being involved in and contributing to efforts that prevent violence and other forms of abuse.

Independent monitoring to prevent violence

Among prevention efforts, a helpful tool that needs to be implemented urgently is the obligation under article 16 (3) of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities to ensure that all facilities and programmes designed to serve persons with disabilities are effectively monitored by independent authorities in order to prevent the occurrence of all forms of exploitation, violence and abuse.
