



## Economic and Social Council

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### Commission on the Status of Women

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Item 3 (a) of the provisional agenda\*

**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”: implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session and its contribution to shaping a gender perspective in the realization of the Millennium Development Goals**

### **Statement submitted by Mouvement Ni Putes Ni Soumises, 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.

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\* E/CN.6/2010/1.



## **Statement**

1. Mouvement Ni Putes Ni Soumises (NPNS), which was established in France in 2003 following the “March of neighbourhood women against the ghettos and for equality”, campaigns for women’s rights and has been in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council since 2007. NPNS would like to offer the following observations on the third report submitted by France to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

### **I. Review of the current situation in France regarding the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women**

2. Women in France still suffer from multiple and various forms of discrimination today, whether or not they are immigrants: their economic rights are denied and they are deprived of social rights, such as access to decent housing; the right to education and literacy; access to health care and reproductive health; access to employment; empowerment opportunities (because of a lack of childcare services); and the right to learn the language of their host country.

3. NPNS therefore calls for the implementation of comprehensive public policies to promote the rights and dignity of women.

4. The current debate over the burka raises the question whether women’s rights are a prerequisite for social progress, or whether they are adjustable and negotiable variables depending on the requests and claims of communities, groups or individuals. For women in France, the burka is the crucial symbol of the point of no return on the road to empowerment, the epitome of an outdated vision where women are relegated to the sexual realm and detached from economic, social and political spheres in our working-class neighbourhoods. The symptoms have been there for a long time, and NPNS was founded to oppose this increasing erosion of our freedoms as women.

5. Alongside rising violence against women, pressure with regard to their physical appearance in public has also increased. Physical and psychological harassment have become intolerable, and some of these women are no longer with us today. The women and girls of these neighbourhoods are becoming passive things in a system of discipline where punitive symbols serve as an example to any female who fails to obey the rules. They have become the standard-bearers of a blueprint for society that chooses the veil as an instrument of social control and a way for immigrants to be accepted. Around that confinement, a discourse reinforcing chauvinistic assumptions has been articulated: the Muslim religion is being used by extremist groups to institute and justify male domination. Some have argued in favour of the veil and the burka because they allow women to go out in public. Do the veil and the burka give women greater freedom? As symbols of chauvinism and patriarchy, they are markers used to divide the French population. True segregation comes when victims internalize their oppression and clamour for their own chains.

6. When we abandon our principles, the whole social model is thrown into question. In the face of these repeated challenges, the defenders of liberty have

fallen into the trap of a cultural relativism that obliges them to justify setbacks in women's rights.

7. In this context, it is important to recall that secularism is not merely the separation of politics and religion, but also an opportunity for interaction between groups. That is the prerequisite for the exercise of universal human rights and liberties. The 2004 law against religious symbols in school, which we supported and promoted, was necessary but insufficient. NPNS therefore reaffirms the universality of women's rights in the face of obscurantism and attempts to relegate women to the private domain.

## **II. Major achievements in the critical areas of concern in the Platform for Action**

### **A. Women and poverty**

8. Women from working-class neighbourhoods, particularly single mothers, are the primary victims of the current crisis.

#### **Recommendations:**

9. The economic situation of these women must be secured by increasing the amount of their benefits. Above all, neighbourhoods must be demarginalized and mothers provided with better access to childcare, training and employment.

### **B. Education and training of women**

10. The right to education also includes respect for the equal rights of men and women.

#### **Recommendations:**

11. We suggest that compulsory civic, legal and social courses should be resumed and revised to become forums for discussion and instruction on respect, sexuality, equality and citizenship.

### **C. Women and health: access to contraception**

12. Access to contraception and abortion is a social right, but not for women from disadvantaged neighbourhoods. These services are inaccessible to young women who comply with the new penalizing values advocated by men, namely virginity, purity and so forth.

#### **Recommendations:**

13. NPNS is campaigning to ensure that a confidential contraception and abortion centre is available in every public hospital, with the full reimbursement of health-care costs. We are also calling for the establishment of a national prevention campaign to ensure that female circumcision is no longer ignored.

## **D. Violence against women**

14. A woman's nationality is central to how the law deals with acts of violence: a young French woman who is the victim of a crime abroad is protected by French law; on the other hand, Algerian and Moroccan women are subject to the family codes of Algeria and Morocco, respectively. In attempting to escape the threats and violence inflicted on them by their spouses, these women face deportation from French territory. They are victims three times over: as women, as victims of violence, and as illegal immigrants.

### **Recommendations:**

15. NPNS calls for police station training in the treatment and management of victims; for the status of female victims of violence to be regularized; and for the abolition of special agreements between France, Algeria and Morocco that run counter to the principles of equal rights between men and women and non-discrimination.

### **Access to housing for women victims of violence**

16. Owing to the lack of emergency housing, we are not in a position to ensure women's safety.

### **Recommendations:**

17. We call for a review of the initiative launched in France whereby a violent spouse is removed from the marital home. We stress the urgent need for psychological and social care and attention until normal life can be resumed. Emergency facilities and shelter with social support are also required for integration into the workforce.

### *Forced and/or early marriage*

18. The law of 4 April 2006 contains several amendments to combat forced marriage. The minimum age for marriage was raised to 18 years and, in order to annul a marriage, the civil registrar, or the diplomatic or consular agents, must hold a hearing attended by both spouses. According to the High Council for Integration, there are 70,000 adolescent victims of forced marriage in France.

### **Recommendations:**

19. To ensure that the 2006 law is effective, educational assistance and child welfare must systematically be made available to minors who are victims or are threatened. We call for training to be given to civil registrars, who may refer matters to the Public Prosecutor for the exercise of the right of opposition. As regards forced marriages contracted abroad, the French legal system must provide a remedy through a "public policy exception". Under such a mechanism, the application of a foreign law on French soil may be refused. NPNS also calls for the annulment of article 181 of the Civil Code, and for an extension of the period in which proceedings may be brought for the annulment of a forced marriage.

## **E. Women and the economy**

20. While equal pay is far from being comprehensive and discrimination persists, women in working-class neighbourhoods suffer disproportionately from such discrimination: they face much higher levels of unemployment, job insecurity and underemployment.

### **Recommendations:**

21. We hope that wage negotiations and plans for equal pay in the workplace will give priority to the issue of double discrimination. Combating discrimination in recruitment, career development or pay must be a priority for the French State. We are focusing on the acquisition of essential skills for independence, such as learning the French language. The reception and integration contract provides courses to only a very limited number of women. We suggest expanding these courses.

## **F. Institutional development**

### **Recommendations:**

22. We call for increased funding for women's advocacy groups in exchange for commitments from them to produce results. We also call for the strengthening of administrations responsible for women's rights. A cross-cutting ministry should deal with women's rights.

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