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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 Susila Dharma International Association, 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 rape in South Africa

Statement submitted by Susila Dharma International Association, a member-based network committed to social justice and equitable development.

The issue: widespread rape in South Africa

The rape figures in South Africa are shocking. A third of men admit to having raped someone, and a quarter of school boys say that jackrolling (gang rape) is fun. In addition, research indicates that teachers commit a third of the rapes in schools.

What are the reasons? Is school not supposed to be a safe place for children, where they can be taught to trust and be trusted? Human Rights Watch reported that girls stay at school but suffer in silence, having learned that submission is a survival skill and sexual violence at school is inescapable.

In the last few months of 2011, charges against a teacher accused of raping 11 pupils in his school were dropped because of insufficient evidence (see <http://www.iol.co.za>).

What can be the reason for children not being able to convince the authorities of the abuse? The girls' experience has taught them that their complaints might be met with disbelief by administrators who are known not to take sexual abuse seriously. The girls would have seen how other girls have been stigmatized because they had the gumption to stand up and complain. They might have witnessed how school heads have hushed up crimes. They are acquainted with victims' families who have been urged to accept "seduction damages" that do not even cover bus fares to hospital. And by rumour or personal knowledge, those girls know that the school principal or local policeman might, themselves, have taken their cut out of those payments.

Those same young people who are being raped by their teachers would believe that it is okay to engage in early and unprotected intercourse with an elder in power. These are the girls who are afraid to refuse sex because they fear abandonment or violence. They are easily coerced. Plus, they have negative perceptions about condoms, and low perceptions about personal risk, in addition to a lack of privacy and time.

Unemployment among black women is unacceptably high at 70 per cent, eight times that of white men. This is a result of the country's discriminatory past, when policies were aimed at suppressing the black majority. The perception of women as second-class citizens and female poverty are factors which contribute to high rates of rape.

According to an article by Fiona Leach and Pamela Machakanja on sexual violence in schools, other teachers often choose to ignore what is going on, principals are reluctant to report the matter because of a bureaucratic investigation and pupils and parents are either intimidated or lack information about how to make a complaint.

Some of these relationships are approved by parents because educators are able to provide money to impoverished households, Parliament was told in a briefing in 2002 by the Department of Education in South Africa.

The HIV/AIDS virus is fuelled by rape. In South Africa, 5.5 million people were living with HIV in 2009 — around 11 per cent of the total population.

A response to the problem

Arguably, a high proportion of safety is in the hands of individuals, law-enforcement agencies being largely unwilling or unsuccessful in the prosecution of perpetrators of gender-based violence. Education and training can thus have a vital role in helping equip girls and women to defend themselves. This is why one of the members of the Susila Dharma International Association, Susila Dharma France, is supporting a pilot project which places the protection of women and girls against rape into their own hands, through self-defence training. The rationale behind this project is that rape figures in South Africa can be reduced by at least 30 per cent over the next five years if enough support and funding can be channelled into schools and communities, in all nine provinces. The success of the programme is built on pyramid training, that is, training African trainers to train trainers, who are contracted to go into schools and into the community to set up anti-rape classes of from 100 to 200 attendees at a time. This has worked in Nairobi. In the slums there, rape figures have been reduced by up to 30 per cent post-training in certain schools, and they have taught up to 1.5 million children how to defend themselves.

The originators of this training in Kenya, No Means No Worldwide, will travel to South Africa to train trainers who will, within two years, become qualified to train other trainers. Over a mere three weeks, 100 trainers can be trained, and each one of them can reach up to 100 young people in schools and the community each week. No organizations in South Africa have tackled the problem of rape through self-defence. This organization will carry out training in schools and in the community at low/no cost.

In Nairobi, No Means No Worldwide has collected in excess of 3,000 testimonials of how the training has been used to defend against rape in the Kenyan slums. Their testimonials are incredible — from a six-year-old who got away from a potential rapist using the self-defence techniques learned, to a 15-year-old girl who managed to get away from three men with guns, and a 65-year-old woman who did the same.

The project organizers believe they can replicate, and beat, those astounding results in South Africa. They plan to do this as part of the 19 Days Campaign against violence towards children and youth in 2013, and would like to start the programme together with the Innocence Revolution Campaign, to be held in cities throughout the world on 14 April 2013, for this campaign lends further strength to the crusade against child sexual abuse.

The programme targets areas of need identified by research. For example, in 2007 a national school violence study by the Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention found that 59.2 per cent of primary school girls had been assaulted three times or more, and fellow learners were 85.9 per cent responsible.

The training has a specific element for boys at school, aimed at reversing attitudes. The anti-rape clubs are age-specific and ongoing — which means that boys (and girls) will be taught new knowledge and skills at school and in the community each year according to their age.

In addition, men are specifically asked to sign up as trainers so that they can not only be role models for boys, but also be asked to speak with other men in the community as part of the programme. Churches, mosques and synagogues will be targeted very early on in the programme in order to keep the profile of the trainers high by ensuring that they are seen to be doing things in the community. This will include media coverage for all talks and training given and will ensure that men as good role models are seen to be out there, and will also include integration of the programme into existing programmes which tackle cultural attitudes.

In due course, negotiations will be initiated with the Government of South Africa to entrench the training into the education system through trainers who become classroom assistants. Female classroom assistants are already working in some schools in South Africa, where their role is to assist teachers. The intention is a shift of the emphasis of their presence in the classroom to that of support for children (especially girl children, and especially in high school). A critical task that they perform is to collect class grades and keep those away from teachers. Students do not then need to approach the teachers about their grades. This reduces opportunities for teachers to manipulate and exploit girls for sex in exchange for altering their results. Classroom assistants also do home visits. The girls' attendance and activities are reported to a supervisor monthly.

The idea of classroom assistants has been successful, having originated in Guinea and Sierra Leone, where women with limited education are given brief training about safety, security and child protection legislation, and are then put into classrooms to be there with girl students all day. The project organizers believe that if classroom assistants are brought into a small number of schools on a trial basis to start with, the outcomes can be used to negotiate with the Department of Education to contract directly with the women themselves as directors of cooperatives or social enterprises which they intend to establish, thus giving the women entrepreneurial opportunities as well as giving them a first step onto the education escalator.

Solutions to these endemic problems have to be multiple, and multi-sectoral, and must involve both government (national, regional and local) and civil society. Susila Dharma International Association is participating in the civil society response to this situation and strongly advocates that other sectors take responsibility. We would therefore like to call on the authorities in South Africa to take whatever measures they can to begin to tackle this serious problem.
