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Statement submitted by Legion of Good Will, 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

We, from the Legião da Boa Vontade/Legion of Good Will, submit our recommendations on the priority theme of the 65th session of the Commission on the Status of Women: “Women’s full and effective participation and decision-making in public life, as well as the elimination of violence, for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls”, as well as on the review theme of this conference: “Women’s empowerment and the link to sustainable development”.

We operate through 95 educational and social assistance centers across seven countries: Argentina, Bolivia, Paraguay, Portugal, the United States, Uruguay, and Brazil, where it all began on January 1st, 1950. Considering just the last five years, we have provided close to 75 million acts of social services and benefits to poor people, families, and communities in an extensive humanitarian operation, even during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Empowerment Towards Environmental Awareness

The great behavioral changes caused by Covid-19 makes us reflect on how we can encourage students to use new knowledge to solve today’s challenging issues in search for alternatives and/or solutions to issues affecting us locally and globally. In the Legion of Good Will’s schools, in which we apply the Pedagogy of Affection (for children up to 10 years old) and the Ecumenical Citizen Pedagogy (as from 11 years old), which comprise the educational line created by the Organization’s President, José de Paiva Netto, we believe that both physical and virtual school environments are capable of fulfilling this role. The key is to holistically contemplate human beings and their Eternal Spirits, each with their own unique spiritual and cultural background.

That is why we do talk to our students about protecting the Amazon rainforest and our ecosystems – even if they live in regions that are geographically distant from it – and work to preserve it. But we also need to care for what is going on with our students inside and outside the school gates.

In our organization, we work with children and young people who come from low-income families, and this has urged us to expand actions like this particularly one that focuses on the environment, among other things.

After all, are all students emotionally well to find purpose in the proposals presented by their teachers? How can we talk, for example, about the importance of taking care of Nature to students who come from homes where there is no protection for them, where violence affects mainly girls because there is no respect for their mothers, sisters, or even themselves, and where they are exposed to danger and/or subjected to abuse? It is a big challenge to plan and carry out any activity for preserving ecosystems when your own human condition is at risk, especially when you are young.

Working for the end of violence

What girls go through in public and private school has sounded like a real cry for help and refuge, resulting from the different forms of violence they suffer. It is through education that we have empowered them, thus breaking a cycle of oppression that was often established in previous generations of the women in their families.

We recognize that the role of the school is not only to educate them intellectually, combining content with their creativity, but also to support them psychologically so they can overcome such difficulties. Moreover, we encourage them to take part in projects such as preserving Nature.

A school needs to adopt concrete measures that protect and offer personal care to its female students and to show them how important they are, that they deserve to be defended from violence and that they are capable of shining academically. They must be encouraged to develop proposals that will help mitigate the effects of current environmental tragedies in the very near future, such as deforestation and arson.

By providing personal protection and developing competences, the Legion of Good Will assists the girls in its schools and social service centers, so that, when they see their talents being recognized, their self-esteem is also improved. For the Legion of Good Will, the school should advise its students, from an early age, on the legal ways of defending women, a subject that concerns boys and young men too, since they need to know how to defend and protect family members who may go through such situation, thus promoting a culture of women's empowerment in society.

For this reason, the multidisciplinary team in its schools focuses on continuously supporting the female students, so they can face up to the challenges and move on without interrupting their studies. Going to college further strengthens the participation of women in their pursuit of equality in terms of their competence, as they fiercely compete for positions and professions that have been (and may still be, for some people) considered only suitable for men, especially management positions.

Matters such as these need to be widely discussed with the new generations in the classroom, so that prejudices can be truly eliminated. These are continuous reflections to be mediated by teachers, along with the family, and be transformed into a variety of activities that reflect empathically on the well-being of those who are part of the society in which they live and work, the concern being to embrace everyone that makes up planet Earth.

It is up to the school to direct all its attention to its female students, those future professionals who deserve to be motivated and feel confident that they can reach positions of leadership, despite the painful situations they might have experienced. From an early age, the school needs to offer these students the foundations they need for strengthening their resilience. Lessons in class and classroom research proposed by the teachers can help them overcome trauma, develop skills, and awaken interest in professions that have an impact on the future of other young women in different parts of the world who face the same issues.

All the support offered by the Legion of Good Will's schools to their female students is in line with the guidelines set out by educator Paiva Netto, who affirms: "Women, the most beautiful side of humanity, singularize the foundation of all great accomplishments. That which physically constitutes us is generated in their wombs. Components of the female gender become indispensable elements for the survival of good causes. Stable organizations count on stable women. (...) My intention here is to stress the fact of how important Women's mission is for human evolution and for world safety".

Our schools are filled with stories of personal success and triumphs of those who arrived when they were still young girls – and many times facing difficult situations. Today these same women are working with students in the classroom or practicing their profession outside the school environment and reflecting on the resilience, the knowledge, and the experience they acquired in projects in their communities and in protecting and caring for Nature, as you have been able to see in this article. We are certain that these seeds will germinate and bear even more fruit.

Women's empowerment

According to the Atlas of Violence 2020 (published in 2020, with data from 2018), every 2 hours one woman is murdered in Brazil. The main victims of homicide are black women, among whom murder rates have increased by 12.4 percent in ten years, while in the same period (from 2008 to 2018) it decreased by 11.7 percent among white women. These shocking figures should not only be a reason for all of us to feel ashamed, but above all they show how urgent it is that we act effectively to protect women in the domestic environment, especially during the pandemic.

Aware of this reality and of the fact that women are those who benefit most from its actions, the Legion of Good Will works towards women's empowerment and the deconstruction of the male chauvinist culture. Examples of this can be seen in the Organization's social service centers, which hold social and educational workshops on gender equality, gender differences in the workplace, domestic violence, and other related topics.

The Solidary Coexistence program – aimed at people from 18 to 59 years old – promotes the strengthening of family and community ties through activities that help expand their knowledge, their artistic and cultural world, in addition to helping improve relationships of affection, solidarity, and mutual respect.

The prevention and deconstruction of sexism occurs systematically in our schools. As opportunities arise during discussions in class – when students make comments like “This is a job for men!” – the teacher intervenes so that the class can understand how incoherent it is to separate the so-called “male” and “female” roles. In the Peaceful Coexistence classes – which address current issues that are relevant to society – topics such as “What is harassment?”, “Maria da Penha Law” and “Combating a culture of rape” are dealt with in a more detailed way, especially among high school students. They also come up through seminars, plays, songs, poems, and other works about these issues. Positive results have been achieved, starting with the change in students' behavior in their own social circles.

In his article “Women and Technology for Peace”, the President of the Legion of Good Will highlights: “To educate with Ecumenical Spirituality is to transform – and let it naturally be for the better. If the human being is transformed, the planet will be restored”.

Maria da Penha Law

In Brazil, since the Law 11.340 was sanctioned on August 7, 2006, the legal process reality of domestic and family violence crimes has changed in terms of punishing the aggressors. Named after the pharmaceutical biochemist Maria da Penha Maia Fernandes, whose life story internationally inspired women to fight domestic violence, the “Maria da Penha Law” creates stricter mechanisms to inhibit and prevent violence against women, besides introducing changes in the Penal Code and in the Criminal Enforcement Law.

Towards a Better Society

Another example is the Solidary Society Network program, carried out by Legion of Good Will, that supports civil society organizations so they may teach their targeted populations about their rights, as set out in the Federal Constitution. The goal is to strengthen the social protection system in Brazil.

This program was enhanced in 2017, in alignment with the SDG goal 17 and the public policies of advisement and assistance in Brazil, released by the National Council of Social Assistance of Brazil, by way of Resolution 27/2011. For the last

seven years, the Solidary Society Network program has provided technical and administrative guidance and trainings to thousands of CSOs, community leaders, and users of the Unified Social Assistance System (SUAS).

During this period, even during the Covid-19 crisis, this initiative has achieved great outcomes on various work fronts thanks to the remarkable presence of women. They stand out because of their regionalized, multistakeholder, and wide-ranging activities on behalf of sustainable development.

In 2019 alone, 2.171 civil society organizations and public bodies received training in courses in the social assistance area from the Solidary Society Network program, which in turns impacted more than 151.970 people.

In this 65th session of the Commission on the Status of Women, we applaud all who have done their part in this long journey and ratify our solidary commitment to the eradication of gender inequality on the planet.
