



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
13 December 2005

Original: English

Commission for Social Development

Forty-fourth session

8-17 February 2006

Item 3 (a) of the provisional agenda*

**Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the
twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly: priority
theme: review of the first United Nations Decade for the
Eradication of Poverty (1997-2006)**

Statement submitted by Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, 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 of 25 July 1996.

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* E/CN.5/2006/1.

Statement

On the occasion of this 44th session of the Commission on Social Development that marks the 10-year Review of the first United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty, my NGO calls to mind that the Resolution of 1996 adopted by the General Assembly (A/RES/51/178) expressed serious concern that of the more than 1.3 billion people in the world living in absolute poverty, a majority were women. The resolution also recognized that Fourth World Conference on Women committed itself to the eradication of poverty. Moreover, it called upon all Governments and the United Nations system to promote an active and visible policy of mainstreaming a gender perspective and to use gender analysis as a tool for the integration of a gender dimension into the planning and implementation of policies, strategies and programs on poverty eradication. It additionally called upon all UN institutions, including Bretton Woods, to promote and contribute to women's increased access to micro-credit and related financial services for self-employment and income-generating activities for those living in poverty.

In reviewing these resolutions, it is disheartening to say that poverty remains a feminized phenomenon where, in any poverty population, up to 70% tend to be women. As noted in the most recent Human Development report, "gender disparities are among the deepest and most pervasive of inequalities."¹ This disparity is entrenched into the institutions of societies and is entwined with the widespread phenomenon of violence against women, of which the increasing trafficking of women for sexual exploitation is only the most recent and most egregious manifestation.

Despite NGOs' insistent voices to implement gender justice into all sectors of public policy, despite Millennium Development Goal #3, and despite a reaffirmation of gender equality in the 2005 World Summit Outcome Document (see General Assembly resolution A/60/1), very little effective action takes place in order to alter the male dominant paradigm in social, economic and political life.

As expressed by women in the grassroots projects of my NGO in their submissions to the UN Division for the Advancement of Women in preparation for the Secretary-General's Study on Violence Against Women for 2006:

"We cannot remain indifferent to the unfortunate position of women in society ... It is time that governments, leaders, and all together joined hands in building a better world for women, a better world for all. In Kenya, almost 99 per cent of the women in prostitution would quit if they had alternative way of earning."

Regarding Women, "The laws in our country (Peru) are given, but there are deficiencies in their application and in other cases their regulation is not adapted to the reality."

"The logistics and support system for survivors of gender-based violence from the focal point of lodging a police report, collection of data and evidence, medical examination of the survivor, treatment of physical injuries and

¹ Human Development Report 2005, *International cooperation at a crossroads: Aid, trade and security in an unequal world*.

psychological trauma right through to the care and support for survivor in Malaysia does not meet even minimum standards.”

“Economic and financial violence cannot be separated from the violence caused by prostitution. (Senegal) One of the causes is the basic needs. A majority of these young women came from the rural areas, leaving their villages with hopes in their hearts to look for a greener pasture in the city. In many cases, the parents pushed their daughters to engage in prostitution to help support their daily needs. Often the young prostitutes are also orphans. On the other hand, the widows and women who are separated from their husbands engaged in this work to support their children: for food, shelter and education. When a family breaks up, the husband ignores his responsibility, he abandons the family and the woman takes all the responsibilities. This is where I link prostitution and economic violence as one. With the 31 women I met and talked to (from November 2004-February 2005), their cases are almost the same ... They were economically deprived. They got themselves into prostitution as the fastest way to earn for a living.”

The NGO endorsers of this statement appeal to this Commission on Social Development with hope since the Copenhagen documents deal holistically and broadly with justice, human rights, and economic development.

We urge this Commission to:

Raise a strong voice and use its influence to promote gender equality and to put an end to all forms of violence against women, including the prostitution and trafficking of women.

Reiterate the analysis of the report of Social Watch 2005 that explains that economic “reforms” that dismantle social obligations of the state and privatize public goods “impact disproportionately on women and deepen gender inequality.”²

Stipulate the need for structurally mainstreamed gender economic policies so that women have access to financial services for self-employment and income-generating activities.

Remind all governments of the need to make a priority the implementation the 12 critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action and the requirements of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, including its optional protocol.

The NGO endorsers of this statement urge governments to:

1. Adopt and actively enforce anti-trafficking legislation using the 1949 Convention for the Suppression of Trafficking in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others and the recent UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children. (See: Report of the Secretary-General, Trafficking in Women and Girls, 28 July 2004 A/59/185, para #6).

² Social Watch 2005, *Roars and Whispers: Promise vs. Action*, Recommendations, Benchmark 3.

2. Sign and enforce the implementation of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography.
3. Include in States-parties' mandated reports to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, relative to article 6 of the convention, an evaluation of the legal status of the prostitution of women, including efforts to prosecute perpetrators, decriminalize women in prostitution, and penalize the demand. Include NGO perspectives in all reports to the Committee.
4. Articulate a coherent national policy in favor of the dignity of women and girls that explicitly denounces prostitution as a violation of the human rights of women and rejects its legalization.
5. Implement universal primary and secondary education for girls, with no school fees. Enact family support mechanisms so that families do not suffer financially when girls go to school.
6. Ensure universal access to all health services for women and girls.
7. Enact legislation that ensures economic rights to women, including property rights, access to sustainable employment, adequate labor protection, and access to financial services.
8. Enact policies and laws that end impunity for perpetrators of any form of violence against women and girls.
9. Use gender analysis as a tool for the integration of a gender dimension into the planning and implementation of policies, strategies and programs on poverty eradication. Set explicit measures to achieve gender equality. Use a concept of poverty that includes not only household income measurement but takes account of dimensions such as economic autonomy and gender violence, as supported by the Social Watch report of 2005.³

This review of the Decade for the Eradication of Poverty is an opportunity for new energy and new commitment for policies that will be effective in poverty reduction. In conclusion, I repeat the words of United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) executive director, Thoraya Ahmed Obaid who said at the launch of the 2005 United Nations State of World Population Report:⁴ “world leaders will not make poverty history until they make gender discrimination history. We cannot make poverty history until we stop violence against women and girls. We cannot make poverty history until women enjoy their full social, cultural, economic, and political rights.”

Note:

The statement is endorsed and supported by the following non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council:

³ Social Watch 2005, *Roars and Whispers: Promise vs. Action*, Gender and Poverty: A case of entwined inequalities, pg. 40.

⁴ Thoraya Ahmed Obaid, UNFPA's executive director, Launch of the United Nations State of World Population Report 2005, 10/12/05.

Coalition Against Trafficking in Women, Congregations of St. Joseph, Dominican Leadership Conference, International Association of Schools of Social Work, International Federation of Women in Legal Careers, International Federation of Women Lawyers, International Kolping Society, International Presentation Association of the Sisters of the Presentation, League of Women Voters of the United States, Loretto Community, School Sisters of Notre Dame, Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, Society of Catholic Medical Missionaries, Soroptimist International, UNANIMA International and World Federation of Ukrainian Women's Organizations
