



## Economic and Social Council

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### Commission on the Status of Women

#### Fifty-third session

2-13 March 2009

Item 3 (a) (i) 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: the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS**

#### **Statement submitted by Womankind Worldwide, 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.6/2009/1.



## **Statement\***

### **Position statement for the Fifty-Third Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women**

#### **Womankind Worldwide**

Womankind Worldwide<sup>1</sup> (WK) is an international women's human rights and development organisation working in partnership with 34 partners in 13 countries around the world to tackle gender inequality and end discrimination against women. In 2009, we are celebrating our **20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of speaking out for women.**

#### **Equal Participation of Women and Men in Decision-Making Processes**

The fifty-third session of the Commission on the Status of Women will evaluate progress on the implementation of the agreed conclusions related to **"Equal participation of women and men in decision-making processes at all levels"** that were adopted at its fiftieth session.

There has been some progress since 2006 in increasing women's role in decision-making processes. For example, women have been elected as Head of State in countries including India, Chile and Argentina. Rwanda now has 55% of women in its Parliament and women now number 8 out of a total of 18 judges at the International Criminal Court. Many more women have actively claimed their right to participate in decision-making at local and community levels by making use of both formal and informal decision-making mechanisms and having their say on everything from healthcare provision to protection of the environment and crime prevention.

However, Womankind Worldwide is concerned that progress is too slow and much more needs to be done to accelerate progress on ensuring greater representation and participation of women in decision-making processes.

In all regions, women are often still perceived as unequal to men in the home and in the workplace, leading to their exclusion or marginalisation in decision-making processes.

#### **Womankind's approach**

Our experiences have taught us that measures to promote women's meaningful participation in development and all aspects of decision-making must be seen in the wider context of women's unequal status in society. They need to be accompanied by concerted efforts to address some of the root causes of discrimination against women, including the imbalance of power between women and men – and the way in which gender roles are articulated at all levels of society, including the state, the family, the economy, education and the media.

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\* Issued without formal editing.

<sup>1</sup> See [www.womankind.org.uk](http://www.womankind.org.uk) to find out more about our work.

Far greater political commitment and resources are now urgently needed to tackle the barriers which continue to constrain women's participation in public life and decision-making. Economic dependency, illiteracy and limited access to education and the same work opportunities as men, discriminatory cultural and social attitudes and negative stereotypes, burden of responsibilities in the home, intimidation, harassment and violence and lack of access to information are all limiting women's full participation in society.

Womankind's partners are using a range of strategies and interventions to challenge women's unequal status with men and increase their participation in decision-making. Our partners are: increasing women's access to information, education and awareness of their rights; creating support networks and coalitions and mobilising women and sharing knowledge; working with men and involving the wider community and the media in challenging attitudes and behaviours that discriminate against women; working with public officials to introduce gender analysis and women's concerns in all areas of government; using decentralisation processes to strengthen democratic governance; holding their elected representatives to account for the promises they make at election time.<sup>2</sup>

### **Our recommendations**

Specifically, Womankind is calling for:

- Full implementation of international women's human rights commitments, in particular the Beijing Platform for Action, United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace & Security, the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and MDG 3 of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals, which set out clear principles and guidelines for ensuring women's full and equal participation in decision-making
- Governments and donors to commit adequate, long-term financial resources to implementing the above mentioned agreements and, together with civil society organisations, track carefully what funds are used to support women's rights
- Greater systematic use of benchmarks and targets and monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to track progress on women's participation in power structures and decision-making
- Involvement of women in all pre- and post-disaster planning and reconstruction efforts and in all aspects of conflict resolution and peace-building
- Use of quotas and other positive action mechanisms to increase women's access to and participation in politics – and monitor their impact – and reform of voting systems that hinder the election and representation of women

<sup>2</sup> For further information about the strategies and interventions of Womankind Worldwide and its partners to promote women's participation in decision-making, please see our 2008 publication *Speaking Out: Promoting Women As Decision-makers Worldwide* <http://www.womankind.org.uk/upload/Speaking%20Out%20Feb%2008.pdf>.

- Provision of technical and financial support to enable women, particularly the most marginalised, such as young women, widows and indigenous women, to participate fully in the development and implementation of national policies, legislation, programmes, projects, budgets and regulatory frameworks
  - Promotion of measures to end violence against women and include mandatory indicators on reducing violence against women when measuring the quality of governance
  - A stronger, better-resourced United Nations gender equality entity – this is key to enabling the United Nations and Governments to deliver on promises made to advance gender equality and women’s human rights at the global and country levels, including increasing women’s participation in decision-making
  - Monitor representation of women in different vocations and levels of work with a view to addressing imbalances and take action to end sexual harassment, violence and other forms of abuse in the workplace
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