



## **Economic and Social Council**

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### **Commission on the Status of Women**

**Fifty-seventh session**

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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; priority theme**

### **Statement submitted by Pax Romana, 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**

### **Introduction**

As States struggle with violence, poverty and unemployment, education is being recognized as a successful and sustainable solution to many social ills. Nevertheless, the global economic and financial crisis has had a devastating effect on Governments everywhere. Most importantly, this crisis has demonstrated that women are a particularly vulnerable group. More than ever, Governments are being challenged to prove their commitment to the development of women and girls through their support for education. Throughout the world, women and girls fall victim to violence and are often unable to liberate themselves from dangerous situations. Education can help free battered women and girls from the grip of abusive relationships. With regard to the implementation of internationally agreed goals and commitments regarding the education of women and girls, Pax Romana believes that Governments must carry out the important task of ensuring that these goals actually influence domestic policy.

### **Policy**

The multifaceted benefits of an education have been acknowledged by Member States. That is a commendable initial step. It is time to turn words into action, especially regarding women and girls. We call upon Member States to make education a higher priority in their budgets than it currently is. When girls are not allowed to fully enjoy their right to an education, they are prevented from becoming part of the solution to many social problems. Moreover, they become more vulnerable to abuse, violence and derision.

Two thirds of the world's uneducated children are girls. This reality of young women and the obstacles they face before even entering a classroom must be addressed to ensure that the goal of education for all is truly upheld. Girls and women everywhere must be provided with equal access to education and a safe learning environment. It is the unfortunate reality of many States that are caught in the centre of violence and war that the atmosphere is often not safe or conducive to learning. Young women and girls are especially susceptible to violence in conflict zones. To curb the risk of losing students to a culture of violence, steps must be taken to make schools safe for children to attend. A commitment must be made to the young people who have not had a role in creating the dangerous situations in their countries.

The practice of measuring the academic success and aptitude of a student through standardized tests reduces students to an exclusive and imperfect measurement. The pressure to produce good results rests on students, teachers and school administrators because the ranking and funding of the school will be affected. The concept of having one test measure the success of all students places poor, minority and migrant students at a disadvantage. Young women and girls are especially affected by this. A more holistic approach to education is necessary. States must re-evaluate their priorities and methods and invest in more comprehensive and inclusive ways to measure success. This can help empower women and girls to be engines of development in their societies and protect them from the inequality that often breeds gender-based violence.

The United Nations development agenda refers to the needs of women and girls regarding education, employment and many other issues. This extends into the general wage gap between males and females. Besides simply ensuring that women and girls have access to education, States must do more to close the wage gap that exists in so many professions. Far too often, women are paid substantially less than their male counterparts for the same amount of work. Furthermore, since women are increasingly becoming the primary breadwinners for their families in many societies throughout the world, this reality is only exacerbating the poverty suffered by so many ordinary families. It is often this vicious cycle of poverty that contributes to violence against women and girls.

Even when women are able to access a fruitful education and occupy a meaningful job, there is always the risk that they will be targeted through sexual harassment, abuse or violence. Many victims of violence in schools or the workplace are stigmatized by a culture that shames and blames a woman for a traumatic experience that is beyond her control. Women are often forced to either resign from their positions or suffer in silence.

### **Recommendations**

In conclusion, Pax Romana makes the recommendations set out below.

The focus on educating women and girls must not fall victim to the economic crisis. Instead of cutting spending on education, this is the opportune moment to invest more in the education of women and girls. Long-term vision, rather than immediate results, will help to eradicate poverty and encourage the realization of many other goals. Without the proper funding directed towards the educational needs of women and girls, the cycles of poverty and unemployment will claim more victims and the elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls will be an impossible dream.

In order to ensure that all students are equally accommodated and valued, legislation must be passed that seeks to embrace the specific needs of young women and girls in the educational system. Education laws must have all students in mind, and schools must be given the proper support needed to help them.

In places where discrimination against women and girls is an issue, Governments should work harder to ensure that nobody is denied her right to an education. Domestic laws that seek to empower women and girls in terms of education must be reinforced through legislation and action on the part of Government.

With the help of non-governmental organizations, States can create and organize empowerment programmes for women and girls. It is important to focus on rural communities and urban slum areas, where there is a high probability that the education provided for women and girls is inadequate.

His Holiness Pope Paul XXIII declared in his social justice encyclical, *Pacem in Terris*, that women were gaining an increasing awareness of their natural dignity. Far from being content with a purely passive role or allowing themselves to be regarded as a kind of instrument, they were demanding both in domestic and in public life the rights and duties which belonged to them as human persons. Thus, countries should ensure that women and girls have a voice in national debates, especially in the development of educational policies. Participating in this process

allows women and girls to take ownership of their future and allows them to rise above the threat of violence. The establishment of national youth councils that are gender-balanced and independent from the Government would ensure that the voice of even the most vulnerable groups is heard.

Every community is unique and has needs that are specific to its population. When considering programmes and initiatives to offer to schools and communities, we ask that goals be shaped to fit the needs of each population. Through surveys of local business, community meetings and available data, what would best aid the women and girls of various localities can be determined. A one-size-fits-all approach to the education of women and girls in far-flung places will always fall short.

The Dakar Framework for Action: Education for All states that partnerships between Governments, non-governmental organizations, communities and families can help ensure the provision of good care and education for children, especially for those most disadvantaged, through activities centred on the child, focused on the family, based within the community and supported by national, multisectoral policies and adequate resources. A true commitment to the education of young women and girls by Governments can be demonstrated by following through on this statement.

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