



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
10 December 2012

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women

Fifty-seventh session

4-15 March 2013

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 Working Women 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

Combating violence against women in the workplace in the Sudan

About the Association

The Working Women Association is a voluntary social institution registered as a non-governmental organization (NGO) in November 1991 in accordance with the Voluntary and Humanitarian Act of the Sudan.

The Association is considered to be one of the most active women's civil society associations working to enhance the standards and principles of decent work among working women in the Sudan.

The Association endeavours to increase awareness of the professional and legal rights of women at the socioeconomic and political levels in the Sudan.

The Association also endeavours to improve the vocational and intellectual competence of its members, who include working women in both the public and private sectors. Its headquarters is in Khartoum.

The Association has branches all over the Sudan at the federal, state, municipal and grass-roots levels.

The Association has been in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council since 2011.

Objectives and working methods of the Association

The Association aims to achieve the following objectives:

- (a) Raise the intellectual and professional efficiency of working women;
- (b) Help to defend and advocate the rights of working women;
- (c) Conduct capacity-building and development training for women at work;
- (d) Study and review laws related to the status of working women;
- (e) Promote the economic and social role of working women;
- (f) Cooperate with organizations, social actors and concerned authorities in the field of gender, working at the local, regional and international levels.

The Association carries out these aims by:

- (a) Providing training and capacity-building;
- (b) Undertaking advocacy and lobbying activities;
- (c) Disseminating information;
- (d) Undertaking research and documentation activities;
- (e) Carrying out income-generating activities to help alleviate poverty;
- (f) Delivering humanitarian assistance in emergencies.

Definition of violence against women

Gender-based violence is recognized today as a major issue on the international human rights agenda. This violence includes a wide range of violations of women's human rights, including trafficking in women and girls, rape, domestic abuse, sexual abuse of children and harmful cultural practices and traditions that irreparably damage the reproductive and sexual health of girls and women.

The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women provides a basis for defining gender-based violence. According to its article 1, violence against women is to be understood as any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.

Violence against women in the context of the workplace

Article 2 of the Declaration presents what the international community recognizes as generic forms of violence against women. The definition encompasses, but is not limited to, physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the community, including violence related to exploitation, sexual harassment and intimidation at work and in educational institutions, trafficking in women and forced prostitution.

Workplace sexual harassment refers to behaviour of an unwelcome nature that occurs in a work context and that could reasonably be expected to make a person feel offended, humiliated or intimidated. It includes behaviour that occurs in a physical workplace, as well as in situations associated with employment (for example, at social functions, conferences or in work locations). Workplace sexual harassment includes sexual hostility (explicitly sexual verbal and non-verbal behaviour) and sexist hostility (insulting verbal and non-verbal behaviour that is not sexual but is based on gender), unwanted sexual attention (unwelcome, offensive interest of a sexual nature) and sexual coercion (demands for sexual cooperation in return for job benefits). Examples of workplace sexual harassment include jokes of a sexually offensive nature, questions about a person's sex life and repeated requests for dates, displaying sexually offensive posters or explicit e-mails and text messages.

Gender-based violence is violence involving men and women in which the female is usually the victim and which is derived from unequal power relationships between men and women.

Manifestations and impact of violence against women in the workplace

Although reliable data on the incidence of violence against women in the workplace are scarce, especially in developing countries, there is an increasing body of knowledge indicating that it is widespread and common. It occurs in a broad context of gender-based discrimination with regard to access to education, resources and decision-making power in private and public life.

Violence against women is a major public health problem and a violation of human rights. Violence against women has major impacts on women's physical and mental health as well as their ability to participate in the workforce, imposing a significant burden on organizations in terms of lost productivity and on the community as a whole.

Given that violence against women in the workplace is a new and emerging area of focus in developing countries, including the Sudan, there is limited evidence of successful prevention strategies.

Current workplace activity addressing violence against women focuses on responding to violence after it has occurred, rather than stopping it before it starts.

Ways to improve the situation of Sudanese working women

Ways to improve the situation of working women in the Sudan can be summarized as follows:

- (a) Revise national legislation and international conventions related to women and work;
- (b) Improve the performance of professionals in the Sudan;
- (c) Consolidate voluntary work through dedicated coherent, capable, creative and initiative members who endeavour to promote the rights of working women;
- (d) Ensure that women at work have duties and responsibilities;
- (e) Upgrade professions practised by women, develop women's skills at work, provide a decent working environment for working women and strengthen partnership and collaboration with stakeholders;
- (f) Promote Sudanese working women at all levels, especially the intellectual, professional, cultural, social and economic levels;
- (g) Encourage Sudanese working women to play a positive and constructive role in the labour market, families and the community.

We hope that individual workplaces and employers are inspired to address violence against women in all its forms by building equal and respectful relationships between women and men and putting practical interventions in place in their organizations.

In order to effectively prevent violence against women, workplace interventions should:

- (a) Address the underlying causes and conditions that lead to violence;
- (b) Target the causes of violence at three levels: individual/relationship, community/organizational and societal;
- (c) Promote respectful relationships and gender equality;
- (d) Ensure effective leadership;
- (e) Be well planned and ensure participation;
- (f) Work in partnership;
- (g) Be integrated into policies and procedures;
- (h) Promote the sharing of knowledge;
- (i) Promote sustainable activities;
- (j) Train staff and raise awareness.

Conclusion and recommendations

Since the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women was adopted by the General Assembly in 1979, important progress has been made in establishing gender-based violence as a human rights concern at the international level. Much less headway has been made, however, in addressing violence against women in the workplace. Changes in labour policymaking will be critical to recognizing and addressing the consequences of violence for women's health in the workplace.

The social dimensions and root causes of violence against women in the workplace should be taken into account, given that, without this understanding of the issue, there can be no focused and responsive policy and programming efforts to deal with such violence.

Violence against women can be prevented and civil society organizations have a critical role to play in this regard. In fact, civil society organizations and NGOs now have a duty to eliminate discrimination, sexual harassment and victimization in the community, institutions of education and the workplace.

There is a need to develop strategic policies and specific plans of action to combat violence against women in the workplace. In doing so, emphasis should be laid on:

- (a) Raising women's awareness of employment legislation;
- (b) Launching a national programme for the development of legislation related to working women;
- (c) Promoting and protecting women's rights in terms of employment and participation in decision-making;
- (d) Strengthening awareness of and capacity to address violence against women in the workplace;
- (e) Playing a leading role in building the Sudanese knowledge base on effective workplace health interventions;
- (f) Enhancing women's participation and representation;
- (g) Creating decent and safe working conditions for women;
- (h) Promoting the adoption and implementation of policies to prevent violence against women and protect victims;
- (i) Enhancing the capacity of the Government of the Sudan to address violence against women in the workplace, improving access to information related to gender and violence and providing support to NGOs and civil society;
- (j) Addressing attitudes and behaviour of men and women, including through awareness-raising, networking and developing stakeholder capacity;
- (k) Providing immediate care and protection to vulnerable individuals and victims through a comprehensive package;
- (l) Advocating the incorporation into domestic legislation of the international and regional agreements signed by the Government of the Sudan.