



## **Economic and Social Council**

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

#### **Fifty-eighth session**

10-21 March 2014

**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 Centro de Investigación Social, Formación y Estudios de la Mujer, 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

### **The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela will not attain the Millennium Development Goals**

Observatorio Venezolano de los Derechos Humanos de las Mujeres (the Venezuelan Observatory for Women's Rights), set up by 45 non-governmental organizations established throughout the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and coordinated by the Centre for Social Research, Training and Studies on Women (CISFEM), carried out through the Internet an inquiry into the actual status of MDGs in the country. The findings are reported below.

#### **First goal: Eradicating extreme poverty and hunger**

Although the Government has reported having attained the poverty reduction goal, an independent assessment of the situation should be undertaken, since failure to back redistributive measures with effective plans for productive job creation through quality education and work-related training leaves the structural causes of poverty intact. The goal, even if temporarily reached, has not been attained in a sustainable manner.

Women's poverty: The National Institute of Statistics, which compiles only aggregate data on poverty, publishes on occasion the number of women heads of household, which increased from 24 to 39 per cent in 2011. Women account for 50.3 per cent of the population and 31.6 per cent of the population is poor. According to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), in 2010 women and men accounted for, respectively, 27.3 and 21.8 per cent of heads of poor households. The total income of women heads of poor households accounts for 51 per cent of the total income of heads of household, which confirms that inequality predominates. No data on wage gaps is officially available or compiled. Thus, the relevant international indicators of the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2008 *Labour Overview. Latin America and the Caribbean*, 2009) furnish no values for the country. The wage gap does not seem to diminish in respect of formal and informal activities in which low-income women engage, which significantly contributes to the increase in women's poverty in the country. A study on the informal sector, based on household sample surveys and comparing the situation of women in 2001 and 2008, shows an increase in the number of women in the informal sector, a decrease in the number of female owners or employers and an increase in the number of female white- and blue-collar workers and non-remunerated domestic workers, sole category in which the percentage of women is higher than men's.

Women's poverty and gender inequality are related to the development of households headed by single, divorced or separated persons; irresponsible parenthood; wage gaps between men and women; double or triple shifts; distribution of household tasks and care for children and old or ill family members; and adolescent pregnancy. The policies aimed at eliminating economic inequalities address merely the effects, not the causes. Although the country has ratified 54 of the 189 conventions of ILO, including 50 that refer to equal opportunities for men and women, there is no equal employment opportunities plan at the Ministries of People's Power for Labour or for Women and Gender Equality. Government

programmes do not address the equal opportunities issue or the ILO principle of "decent work".

Sustainable development is a prerequisite for the MDGs. Such human goals must be pursued from a human rights perspective. Since they all relate to girl children or adolescent, adult or elderly women, who make up half of humanity, the gender perspective must be mainstreamed into all MDGs.

### **Third goal: Promoting gender equality and empowering women**

Remarkably, there is no indicator related to the elimination of violence against women and children. In a context of impunity (92 per cent of crimes go unpunished) and of symbolic violence in the political discourse of the authorities, insecurity constitutes the main concern of persons living in Venezuela. The number of women dead as a result of violence is increasing by the day. Despite the new Basic Act on Women's Right to a Life Free of Violence, adopted in 2006, the problem of violence against women has not been solved. Moreover, statistics on the status of women which are necessary as a basis for appropriate decisions are lacking, and so are a regulation implementing the Act and systematic training for public officials who process complaints of violence against women. The provisional status of judges and staff turnover are a problem. Where regular judges independently take decisions that displease the national Government, their career in the judiciary may be cut short or even, as in the well-known case of Maria Lourdes Afiuni, they may be jailed or subjected to various types of violence, including rape.

Political representation: Although article 21 of the Constitution refers to the significance of positive measures for groups discriminated against, the sole provision that the Basic Act on Suffrage and Political Participation contained for such action, namely a 30 per cent quota for women elected to public office, has been repealed. Actually, women account for 17 per cent of National Assembly members, while two elected governors and 24 mayors are women (accounting, respectively, for less than 10 per cent of the former and 7.21 per cent of the latter). Women's parliamentary representation in the country is lower than the average for Latin America and the Caribbean (24.5 per cent) and the world (20 per cent).

Gainful employment: The trend towards informal employment of women is structural. Such employment conceals the work carried out by housewives, the fact that unremunerated domestic help is the sole category of workers with more women than men, and the issues of workplace (the house or market stalls) and enterprise size (many women work in enterprises with a single employee). In 2011, the wage gap by number of years of education was, as a ratio of women's to men's earnings, 79.3 per cent for 0-5 years, 80 per cent for 6-9 years, 87.8 per cent for 10-12 years and 89 per cent for 13 years or more (according to ECLAC data). In other words, participation in the educational system does not eliminate gender inequality in respect of income. The goal must shift towards gender equality based on human rights and aimed at women's empowerment and must explicitly include the elimination of violence against women and children.

### **Fifth goal: Improving maternal health**

Current behaviour patterns tend to maintain the maternal mortality rate above 55 per 100,000 registered live births, a level five times the target to be attained by 2015 according to the MDG, which provides for reduction by three fourths. The rate

is at its 1990 level. There is no policy on women's health, with programmes that would address their needs in view of their life cycle, social condition or ethnic group and provide social guidance.

Adolescent pregnancy: The adolescents' contribution to maternal mortality is estimated at 14 per cent, a figure that gives grounds for concern in a country with more than 6 million adolescents and 31.6 per cent of the population below the poverty line. In respect of age group 15-19, the National Institute of Statistics reports for 2009 a national adjusted fertility rate of 89.40 per 1,000, higher than the regional average. The results of a series of high-budget programmes and initiatives that have been adopted are quite disappointing.

**Sixth goal: Combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases**

No health goals have been attained. HIV/AIDS is spreading. The national AIDS/Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) prevention programme reports 11,000 new cases every year, shortages in medicines and inadequate coverage. In its issue of August 2013, the *Epidemiological Bulletin* of the Ministry of People's Power for Health reports an 88.21 per cent increase in the number of malaria cases, the highest level recorded in 70 years according to the Venezuelan Society for Public Health. Tuberculosis, eradicated from the country in the 1960s, is reappearing. Weaknesses in prevention and monitoring, inefficiency and corruption compound an ongoing process of de-institutionalization and centralization that affect the quality of programmes and services.

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