



## Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General  
31 December 2014

Original: English

---

### Commission on the Status of Women

#### Fifty-ninth session

9-20 March 2015

**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”**

### **Statement submitted by World Mission Foundation, 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.

---

\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

We cannot talk about national or global development without addressing the issues of discrimination and violence against women and girls in the world today. In almost, if not all the nations of the world today, women and girls are subjected to one form of discrimination and or violence. Women suffer these social problems at home, at their jobs, in their professions, in politics and economy, and even in their communities and the society at large. In some part of the world, women are subjected to unspeakable cruelties all in the name of tradition and culture. Worthy to note here that women in some cultures are perpetrators of violence and discrimination of other women all in the name of tradition; a sad thing indeed.

In this statement, we will be highlighting some of the major issues of concern in this matter as it affects the United Nation's Millennium Goals 2015. To better understand the magnitude of this problem, we will take an in-depth look at the two key words here: Discrimination and Violence.

Discrimination according to Civil Rights-FindLaw legal website means to distinguish, single out, or make a distinction. In everyday life, when faced with more than one option, we discriminate in arriving at almost every decision we make. But in the context of civil rights law, unlawful discrimination refers to unfair or unequal treatment of an individual (or group) based on certain characteristics such as age, sexual orientation, gender, religion, race, ethnicity, disability, etc. (civilrights.findlaw.com). The Merriam-Webster online dictionary also defines it as "the practice of unfairly treating a person or group of people differently from other people or groups of people" (LearnersDictionary.com).

Women and girls form part of the larger group of people mostly discriminated against in the world today. Even in the western world that is termed developed nations, women suffer some kind of discrimination especially in the workplace and in politics, and this is called sex based discrimination; unfavourable treatment of someone because of her sex. In addition, women in many parts of the developed world suffer discrimination in pay and compensation when they are not paid or compensated as their male counterpart at their workplace. Also, when a woman is temporarily unable to perform her job and duties at her workplace due to a medical condition related to pregnancy and childbirth and is not treated fairly as other disabled persons, she is discriminated against (<http://www.eeoc.gov/laws/>).

Violence is defined by the American Psychological Association as "an extreme form of aggression such as assault, rape, or murder" (www.apa.org). The World Health Organization defines violence as "the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, mal-development, or deprivation." (www.who.int). United Nations Population Funds define Violence against women as a "continuum of acts that violate women's basic human rights", and it includes physical, psychological and sexual harm or threats thereof, and it may be perpetrated within families, within communities or by governments ([www.unfa.org/rights/violence.htm](http://www.unfa.org/rights/violence.htm)).

The World Health Organization states that Violence against women is a major violation of women's human rights and a public health problem affecting millions of women and girls, and those women and children experience short and long-term physical, mental, sexual and reproductive health consequences of such violence

([www.who.int](http://www.who.int)). According to them, “Violence against women — particularly intimate partner violence and sexual violence against women — are major public health problems and violations of women’s human rights”. They reported that the recent global prevalent figure shows that 35 per cent of women have suffered this abuse one time or more in their lifetime.

In Charlotte Bunch’s opinion, violence against women and girls is a violation of human rights in a pervasive way; it is often embedded in cultures around the world, though in most cases invisible, it is a “construct of power and a means of maintaining the status quo”. If everybody recognizes it this way, Bunch said it can be dismantled ([www.eldies.org](http://www.eldies.org)). In addition, M. Ellsberg’s, the senior advisor, Gender, Violence and Human Rights, PATH, Washington, DC, USA, states that violence against women is not just a violation against women’s human rights; it is also a serious health and development concern. In addition, women’s sexual and reproductive health is seriously affected as well as the health of their children. According to this report, violence is said to be rooted in gender inequality ([www.elsevier.com/locate/ijgo](http://www.elsevier.com/locate/ijgo)).

In addition to this is Lori Heise’s opinion that gender based violence such as rape, domestic violence, murder, sexual abuse, etc. endangers the health of women all across the globe and has now been recognized as an issue for public health. She also stresses the magnitude of the problem, stating that gender based violence includes a host of harmful behaviour that is directed at women and girls because of their sex. Such harmful behaviours include: wife abuse, sexual assault, dowry related murder, marital rape, selective malnourishment of female children, forced prostitution, female genital mutilation, and sexual abuse of female children ([www.scielo.br/scielo.php?pid](http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?pid)).

To buttress the magnitude of this social problem, Heise reports that the most pervasive form of gender violence is abuse of women by their intimate partners. According to her, from over 30 well designed surveys from a wide range of countries, between one-fifth to over half of the women interviewed have been beaten by a male partner, with the majority of them beaten at least three times a year, leaving many of them experiencing persistent psychological and sexual abuse as well. She also reported that in America, women are more likely to be assaulted and injured or raped and killed by a current or ex-male partner than all over the world.

In South Asia for instance, the rigidity of the culture and patriarchal system devalue the role of women and the result is a wide spread occurrence of violence against them; the men are the undisputed rulers of their households and activities within the family are seen as private. In this way, the woman is often at the mercy of the man, the head of the household (Niaz, U.). In addition to this, Niaz reported that due to the Hindu patriarchal culture of the region, females are viewed as inferior to their male counterparts. Even Buddhism considers women subservient to men.

In buttressing the magnitude of this misdemeanour, Niaz reported that women are generally treated as second class citizens in India and Pakistan, and wives are battered for misconduct or minor mistakes. It is also reported from a survey conducted in 1999 that about 25 per cent of women in India suffer physical abuse, while from another report, about 18 to 45 per cent of married men in five districts in Northern India acknowledged physically abusing their wives. In another study in Maddgar in 2001, Niaz stated that about 586 cases of rape, including gang rape and

sexual assault were reported in various parts of the country. Other forms of abuse reported in Southern Asia include sexual harassment, traditional mode of violence where women are seen as properties and disallowed a choice in marriage, honour killings where in places like Pakistan, men kill women and girls who in some way have violated norms relating to the behaviour of women and thereby damage a man's honour.

Other forms of violence include dowry violence; the most extreme form of domestic violence where a husband and his family members burn his wife with a stove if he is not satisfied with the victim's dowry. It was reported that about 206 women died of stove burning in the year 2000; according to a report in Bangladesh, insufficient dowry is punishable by throwing acid at the brides, and in another report, there was an increase of 71.5 per cent in cases of torture and dowry deaths during the period of 1991 to 1995. Also, women in custody are reportedly abused by the police who rape these women while in custody.

The issue of discrimination and violence against women and girls can be detrimental to the physical, mental, emotional, and psychological health of women and their children, and also a menace to society. In addition to this, it is crippling the economic growth and development of many nations and is indeed a global problem that should be combated.

---