

Fifty-seventh session

4 – 15 March 2013

Item 3 (a) 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; priority theme: “Elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls”.

Statement submitted by Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, non-governmental organizations 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.

Introduction

Good Shepherd Sisters are present in over 70 countries. The organization is committed to work zealously with women and children, especially those who are trafficked, forced to migrate or oppressed by abject poverty. This commitment has at its very heart the priority theme of the Commission on the Status of Women 57 namely the elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls. Trafficking in women and girls, migration and poverty are some of the most exploitative situations there are which perpetrate, condone and conceal violence against women and girls. The content of this statement is based on the results of a simple questionnaire sent to 51 field offices. There were 27 responses from 24 countries in the following regions, Africa, Western Asia, Asia Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, Europe and the United States of America.

The questions focused on gaining a better understanding of

- (a) Type of violence addressed and services provided
- (b) Main challenges
- (c) Innovative practices
- (d) Recommendation to the Commission on the Status of Women

(a) Type of violence addressed and services provided

The following types of violence are addressed: Domestic Violence (100%), Sexual Violence (81%), Human Trafficking (63%), Teenage pregnancy (56%), Discrimination against Migrant Women (44%), Girl Child Marriage (19%), Female Genital Mutilation (11%), Honour Killing (11%) and Dowry Murder (4%). Other types mentioned frequently were prostitution, gender and transgender-based acts of violence. Services provided include Counseling (93%), Education

(89%), Shelter (85%), Skills Training (85%), Medical (56%), and Legal (56%). In just this small sampling of a small organization we see the lives of 12,702 women and girls have been marred by multiple types of violence and that these women and girls avail of services when offered.

b) Main Challenges

Respondents reported three distinct factors that both service providers and victims/survivors face in reversing the trend of violence against women and girls: (i) lack of resources, (ii) non-enforcement of the law and (iii) the normalization of violence against women and girls.

(i) The lack of resources included not only funding but lack of professional personnel, referral services and educational and training programmes. Where there is reluctance on the part of government to address violence against women and girls through services and funding our organization provides alternatives – shelter coupled with referral to medical and legal services as required, economic empowerment through skills training coupled with counseling and payment of school fees when it is possible to upgrade educational level. Approximately half of the centers providing services rely entirely on the beneficence of donors and volunteers to make the services possible. The other half receives government funds with the numbers skewed in favor of the more developed regions. In addition, many indicated that while funds from the government are helpful, they are not sufficient and therefore need to be supplemented with funds from other sources.

(ii) Non-enforcement of the law to prevent and punish violence against women and girls was the second most recurring challenge reported. 23 of the 24 countries indicated the existence of such laws while 7 countries reported that the laws provided inadequate protection or were not implemented or enforced.

(iii) The normalization of violence against women and girls is a most disturbing challenge. All respondents reported provisions of services to deal with domestic violence. The literature on violence notes that perpetrators of violence against women are most often intimate partners. This is verified in the provision of services to address domestic violence issues and is further elaborated in comments that in some cultures ‘it is not uncommon for physical or even sexual violence to be committed against a woman or girl as punishment for a crime as defined by the perpetrator.’ To make matters worse, the reality experienced by our service personnel is that many women and girls suffering from acts of violence accept this treatment either due to cultural or societal pressure, or simply out of a lack of knowledge of their right to live free of such violence.

(c) Innovative Practices

A representative sample of innovative practice from Ethiopia, India, Colombia and Ireland are outlined here.

In Ethiopia, women and girls relocating from the urban to the rural areas are provided with funds to purchase a cell phone and SIM card. This enables them to have access to supportive relationships providing guidance and counseling from a distance. Having a network of knowledgeable and supportive guidance counselors at hand decreases likelihood of falling victim to repeated violence.

From India the respondent cited examples of communities which have created ‘legal cells’ for women. These are community based services addressing conflict, mostly domestic violence cases. Following registration of a case, a legal team consisting of professional advocates, case workers and staff explore solutions for each case while being cognizant of cultural and familial ties. Such initiatives serve as a source of empowerment for the individual and the community.

Successful prevention will always be the best practice. 89% of centers provide some form of preventive service. The third good practice comes from Colombia. This service combines nutrition and education. In order to maintain and increase school attendance rates, the center provides students who attend school with lunch. The incentive of nutrition encourages many to attend regularly and the results are positive. The more time girls spend in school, the less likely they are to fall into dangerous situations.

The respondent from Ireland, networked with ‘MOVE’ Men Overcoming Violence. MOVE works to support the safety and wellbeing of women and their children who are experiencing, or have experienced violence/abuse in an intimate relationship.” The program does this by “facilitating men in a weekly group process that involves then taking responsibility for their violence and changing their attitudes and behavior.” <http://www.moveireland.ie> MOVE addresses violence in intimate relationships in a constructive manner that leads to change of behavior.

Addressing challenges

Another good practice is the networking of producers and marketers. The producers, enterprising women in Sri Lanka, Thailand, Kenya, Peru, El Salvador, Philippines, Bolivia, Indonesia and Mexico, make unique, handmade goods that are marketed by HandCrafting Justice, USA <http://www.handcraftingjustice.cedris.org/>, Sharing Fair, Europe and Trading Circle, Australia <http://www.thetradingcircle.com.au/story/index.asp> according to Fair Trade principles. Women and girls are helped to develop business acumen, afforded economic opportunities, have access to on-going education, supported in personal development including confronting all forms of violence perpetrated against them. Women and girls are empowered to name, discuss and confront the many forms of violence perpetrated against them.

The Good Shepherd International Foundation <http://www.fondazionebuonpastore.org/> fundraises for local partners in 38 countries in the global south. The Foundation applies for international grants from public funding agencies, private sponsors and NGOs.

Conclusions:

Education was identified by virtually all respondents as a key component in addressing violence against women and girls. Currently, efforts to eliminate violence against women and girls are undermined by lack of awareness, harmful cultural practices, the favouring of boys over girls and the prevalence of patriarchal societies. Through the education of both genders, more women and men can come to challenge and even denounce the current status quo, which will set the stage for change. Concepts of gender equality can be taught to girls and boys at a young age, so that they can grow into women and men who respect each other’s human rights and uphold gender equality.

Furthermore, poverty is a driving force leading to violence against women and girls as well as a hindrance to its eradication. The types of violence listed by respondents can be linked directly to economic factors. For instance, in cultures where girl child marriage is practiced, most girls are married for the financial benefit of their families. When girls and young women are trafficked it is because of poverty. As service providers we have seen the positive impact of programmes but recognize that remedying violence against women and girls is the primary responsibility of the state.

Recommendations:

- Empower women economically. Implement the International Labour Organization Recommendations 202 concerning 'national floors for social protection' aimed at extending essential health care and basic income security to all.
- Enforce the law. Adopt a strong national human rights based policy of zero tolerance of violence against women and girls including prosecuting perpetrators.
- Educate men and boys, women and girls to continually challenge prevailing attitudes of violence against women and girls.