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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”

Statement submitted by American Psychological Association, Armenian Constitutional Right-Protective Centre, Institute for Multicultural Counseling and Education Services, International Association of Applied Psychology, International Council of Psychologists, International Union of Psychological Science, Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues and World Council for Psychotherapy, 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.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Psychological and social science research indicates that empowerment is essential to progress and sustainable development. Empowerment is a multi-dimensional psychological and social process that requires access to, and control over, resources and other conditions of their lives by individuals and groups. The global problems of violence, discrimination, and inequalities that confront women and girls, however, impedes their development of empowerment, in addition to violating their human rights. These barriers, in turn, prevent women and girls from contributing to the sustainable development of their societies.

On the occasion of the one-year anniversary of the tragic abduction of the Nigerian schoolgirls, we, organizations of psychologists accredited by the Economic and Social Council at the United Nations that are committed to human rights and social justice, launched a Call to Action by the international community to heed the importance of fully implementing international human rights standards, which protect women and girls against abductions, trafficking and all other forms of violence and discrimination. This Call to Action is available at: [<http://psychologycoalitionun.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/PCUN-Statement-on-the-one-year-anniversary-of-the-abduction-of-the-Nigerian-schoolgirls.pdf>]

This statement to the 2016 Commission for the Status of Women builds upon our Call to Action described above. It urges all Member States of the United Nations and other stakeholders to commit to the “Elimination and Prevention of Human Trafficking and All Forms of Violence Against Women and Girls as Crucial Pathways to their Empowerment and Contribution to Sustainable Development.” It is submitted by the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues, and co-sponsored by the organizations listed below as part of this joint statement and other organizational members of the Psychology Coalition at the United Nations. References in support of the research described in this statement can be found within the Call to Action described above and located on the Psychology Coalition at the United Nations website: [<http://psychologycoalitionun.org>]

Impact of Trafficking and other Forms of Violence on Women and Girls

Psychological science indicates that the harsh conditions, persistent and extreme abuse, and trauma associated with abduction, human trafficking, and other forms of violence against women and girls may seriously hamper their psychological, physical, and social-emotional development. Outcomes include physical injury, higher rates of sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS, and poorer reproductive healthcare. In addition, the complex trauma associated with their experiences pose challenges to their resilience and contributes to their short-term mental health distress, and, in some cases, longer-term psychopathology manifested in: (a) psychological reactions (e.g., hopelessness, lower self-esteem, anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder; (b) psychoactive substance abuse and dependence; (c) psychosomatic reactions (e.g., headaches and sleeping problems); and (d) negative social reactions (e.g., feelings of isolation, loneliness, and hostility).

Gaps in the Implementation of International Human Rights Standards

Numerous national, regional and international human rights agreements provide safeguards for the protection of women and girls against abductions, trafficking and other forms of gender-based discrimination and violence. Despite the commitments made by governments and the international community, however, major gaps exist in the implementation of these protections. As a consequence of inadequate enforcement, compounded by the social norms and cultural traditions that perpetuate gender-based social inequities, stereotypic attitudes, and discrimination toward women and girls in many parts of the world, uncounted numbers remain powerless, invisible, neglected, and exploited.

Education is a vital factor to improve the human rights and empowerment of women and girls globally. The destruction of educational facilities and the abduction of schoolgirls are among the most damaging consequences of armed conflict because they seek to ensure that women's and girls' status and roles within patriarchal structures prevail. More than 40 per cent of out-of-school children live in conflict-affected countries, where we also find some of the largest gender inequalities and lowest literacy levels in the world.

Although a number of countries have made commendable efforts to combat human trafficking, this crime continues to expand because of the ongoing demand for sex with children, the lower social status of girls and women, extreme poverty, inadequate legislation, lack of enforcement of relevant laws, failure to prosecute offenders, and disregard for human rights.

Recommendations

We urge all Member States of the United Nations and other stakeholders to:

PROMOTE A HUMAN RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH TO GENDER EQUALITY

Strengthen the implementation of all existing commitments, in particular the provisions of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women, and the goals of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, as well as those that provide for the protection of girls and women from abductions, trafficking, and all other forms of gender-based violence.

Develop and implement national legislation and policies to eliminate abduction, trafficking, and all forms of violence and discrimination against the rights of women and girls, applicable to all administrative levels and sections of each country, and consistent with international human rights commitments.

Promote the adoption of a national plan of action and ensure that adequate resources are allocated to implement, monitor, and evaluate the impact of legislation at the local and national levels to protect women and girls from abduction, trafficking, and all forms of discrimination and violence.

SUPPORT ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT VIA EQUAL ACCESS TO ECONOMIC RESOURCES

Fulfilment of human rights is a precondition for women and girls to successfully become empowered both economically and socially. Barriers to the full

enjoyment of their rights must be removed with urgency. Legislative and administrative reforms must promote the economic empowerment of women and girls through policies, strategies, and programmes that ensure equal access to education at all levels, physical and mental health services, employment opportunities, and economic resources.

INTENSIFY EFFORTS TO REDUCE POVERTY AND ECONOMIC INEQUALITY

The feminization of poverty requires investing sufficient resources for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. Promoting gender equality and empowerment helps to reduce poverty, hunger, disease, environmental degradation, and violence.

INVEST IN QUALITY EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Investment in quality education and training, including vocational and literacy training, is a central intervention with strong multiplier effects. Comprehensive national education strategies must include long-term funding that ensures adequate education infrastructure and prioritizes girls' education in all development and poverty reduction plans.

Fulfil and protect access to, and enjoyment of, education as a human right of girls, by establishing schools as safe learning environments, free from all forms of violence at, and on the way to and from, school — including abductions, sexual harassment, exploitation, rape, physical, and psychological abuse, and other forms of gender-based violence.

Comply with the Secretary General's 5-Year Global Education First Initiative by putting every child in school, and improving the quality of teaching and the availability and quality of books and educational materials.

Ensure that the educational curriculum and processes of schools foster education for sustainable development, global citizenship, peace, tolerance, inclusiveness, and justice.

ENSURE PSYCHOSOCIAL RECOVERY FOR VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE

Develop and implement timely and appropriate policies, programmes, and gender- and age- appropriate psychosocial services for all victims of trafficking and their families, including medical and mental health care, psychosocial recovery and (re)integration support, in accordance with international law, as well as outcome documents of other international conferences.

Provide education on human rights to survival, safety, development, and participation in schools for teachers, students and staff, and provide human rights training for all persons involved in providing services to women and girls.

ESTABLISH MEANINGFUL PARTNERSHIPS

Engage in genuine partnerships that include governments, United Nations Agencies, civil society, and other stakeholders for implementation at the local and national government levels of the United Nations Secretary-General's Campaign to End Violence against Women and Girls and recommendations of the United Nations World Report on Violence against Children.

IMPROVE DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Strengthen countries' capacity to collect and analyse data (disaggregated by sex, age, race/ethnicity, tribal affiliation, socioeconomic status, religious affiliation, state, region, etc.) to assess community needs and to implement and evaluate the effectiveness of policies and programmes designed to eliminate abductions, trafficking, and other forms of violence against women and girls, as well as of projects designed to identify and to provide programs and services for victims of trafficking following their identification as victims. Examples of promising practices, and lessons learned, in promoting gender equality and women and girls' empowerment in rural areas should be compiled and shared, with a view to replicating and scaling up successes.
