



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
9 November 2016

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women

Sixty-first session

13-24 March 2017

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 Greek Orthodox Archdiocesan Council of North and South America and Salesian Missions, 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

Economically Empowering Women Infected with HIV by Ensuring Their Property Rights

Introduction

The empowerment of women and gender equality are central components of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. As international faith-based organizations of the Christian tradition, we acknowledge the progress made by Member States and civil society organizations since the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. While the Millennium Development Goals addressed HIV/AIDS, the 2030 Agenda builds on this effort through Sustainable Development Goals 1, 3 and 5. The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) has proposed the 90-90-90 plan, where by 2020, 90% of all persons living with HIV will know their status, 90% of the infected population will receive treatment, and 90% of those receiving treatment will also have viral suppression. To solve the HIV/AIDS epidemic, the global community must provide comprehensive HIV treatment. In his 2016 report on ending the HIV/AIDS epidemic, Secretary General Ban Ki-moon stated that all discriminatory and punitive laws against women with HIV/AIDS must cease. The implementation of medical treatment to a greater segment of the population around the world, while simultaneously empowering women economically through property rights, are crucial to achieving Sustainable Development Goal 3, to ensure no one is left behind in the 2030 Agenda.

We reaffirm our shared interest in the empowerment of women and girls and the right to conditions that promote health and medical treatment. All people are entitled to live with dignity regardless of gender, sex, or HIV status. A person should not be denied capacity for economic empowerment and financial opportunity based on HIV status.

Assessing the problem of HIV/AIDS and its Impact on Women

Over the past twenty years, there has been a consistent decline in the number of HIV infections worldwide. Despite this improvement, the change has not been shared equally by both sexes. HIV/AIDS continues to be the leading cause of death among women who are of reproductive age. Millions each year are infected with HIV. Some pass it on to their children unaware that they are doing so. Furthermore, a majority of women in low and middle-income countries do not participate in HIV testing, so a significant number of people are continually exposed and exposing others to infection unwittingly.

In addition to the health-related scenarios that develop out of these conditions, being infected with HIV affects a woman's ability to hold a job, earn money, and receive inheritance. Women infected with HIV would benefit from opportunities to become economically independent and free from discrimination. Furthermore, girls and women in many places are prevented from owning property due to local laws or social norms. Widows of HIV/AIDS victims face similar treatment, including dispossession of property because they are blamed for their husband's deaths. Conversely, there is evidence to suggest there is a positive correlation between

property ownership and a decrease in HIV infections, making it crucial to open up these opportunities. UNAIDS expresses that in order to achieve the 2030 Agenda and solve the HIV/AIDS epidemic, women must be able to make their own economic and health related decisions.

The physical, emotional, physiological, spiritual and social consequences inflicted on those infected with HIV are tremendous for all. However, the disease itself, as well as the societal impact, disproportionately affects girls and women. Statistics related to HIV/AIDS and women have been cited in the following sources:

1. UNAIDS notes that approximately 36.7 million people live with HIV/AIDS worldwide;
2. In 2015, approximately 2.1 million people were newly infected with HIV;
3. UNAIDS reports that approximately 1.1 million people died from HIV/AIDS in 2015;
4. According to the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), 65% of new infections among adolescents and young people, age 10-24, are girls and women;
5. In 2015, approximately 400,000 girls and women, aged 10-24, became newly affected with HIV/AIDS;
6. According to UNAIDS, in many African countries, young women are twice as likely to contract HIV/AIDS than men;
7. In 2015, approximately 390,000 adolescent girls and women contracted the disease;
8. The Foundation for AIDS Research (amfAR) reports that HIV is the leading cause of death among women during their reproductive years (15-49);
9. Data from the International Center for Research on Women shows that women in many countries are less likely to own property or inherit from their family members than men;
10. The International Center for Research on Women data further suggests that in certain parts of the world, particularly agricultural nations, women's ownership of property strongly correlates with reduced HIV infection rates. Property ownership and economic security allows women to avoid risky situations that have a higher likelihood of infection.

The HIV/AIDS epidemic has experienced significant positive change over the past two decades. Infection rates are down overall and more people have access to proper treatment. While these improvements are praiseworthy, there is still work to be done. Girls and women are still disproportionately affected by the disease and find themselves in situations where they are more likely to contract or transmit it to their children. They are often expected to provide care for those affected, while simultaneously being discriminated against for either having the disease themselves, or being blamed for transmitting it. Furthermore, based on the changing family structures in many countries, the added pressures of either taking care of persons with HIV/AIDS has left many women outside of the paid workplace. The International Labour Organization reports that reduced birth-rates worldwide and

the growth of single-parent households have increased the pressure for women to remain in unpaid roles, further diminishing their empowerment opportunities. The global community must ensure that all persons infected have access to treatment and those who are not can take advantage of preventative measures. Empowered women, particularly in the area of economic and property rights, are in a better position to share equally in the tremendous gains made in the reduction of HIV/AIDS.

Recommendations

Recognizing our common but differentiated responsibilities, we recommend Member States and civil society partner to:

1. Ensure women have access to appropriate health care and treatment options to related to HIV/AIDS;
2. End stigma and discrimination of those with the HIV/AIDS within their communities;
3. Educate women about treatment options and their rights regarding decision-making processes;
4. Reduce the existing barriers to accessing and utilizing services, including ineffective treatment, inability to travel, as well as cultural and familial pressures;
5. Ensure women's full, inclusive and effective participation by providing equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life;
6. Make legislative reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, inheritance and natural resources and access to financial services;
7. Adopt and strengthen existing policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels;
8. Ensure women's right to decent work regardless of their HIV status.