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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 Legião da Boa Vontade, 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

With the aim of contributing to the fifty-seventh session of the Commission on the Status of Women, Legião da Boa Vontade presents its main social and educational activities relating to the central theme of the session: “Elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls”. The subject will be debated at United Nations Headquarters in New York by Member States, United Nations agencies and civil society organizations.

Notwithstanding the efforts made by Governments, by the United Nations, and by countless organizations that are dedicated to the cause, we still come across high levels of violence against women. In this worrying scenario we see that, more than just isolated episodes of individual brutality in different regions of the world, violence is a recurring practice and trivialized in many societies. It is estimated that 7 out of every 10 women in the world have already suffered some physical and/or sexual violence at some point in their lives, most of the time perpetrated by their own companion. According to the United Nations, the root of this problem lies in the persistence of the mentality of discrimination against women and in the historical gender inequality.

The recommendations of Legião da Boa Vontade are based on three pillars: “Next steps in combating gender violence”, “Drugs and violence against women”, and “Action at early infancy”.

Next steps in combating gender violence

Recognition of the many forms of prejudice and, consequently, fighting this problem need to guide the debates that aim to prevent manifestations of violence and discrimination of any nature. For more than six decades the Legião da Boa Vontade has been working to value life and promote the complete health of human beings, in accordance with the organization’s guidelines. Its President, José de Paiva Netto, has declared: “Combating violence in the world begins in the fight against the indifference to the fate of one’s neighbour. To allow the feeling of compassion between individuals to be sacrificed is the same as promoting the collective suicide of nations. We live in times of transformation, of rupture with the past. Is it for the better? It all depends on the sense of humanity we have now.”

In 2013, the urgent global priorities are: to guarantee that the victims of violence have access to support services; to expand primary prevention; and, above all, to fight against the impunity of the aggressor and ensure the victim’s access to justice and effective reparation. In Brazil, the Maria da Penha Law has been in force for six years. It is considered by the United Nations as one of the three best pieces of legislation in the world for women’s rights and protection. However, there are still obstacles to making it fully effective, such as the lack of preparation of the professionals who help female victims of aggression, the lack of police equipment, and the lack of preparation of judges in terms of knowledge of gender violence. Even so, progress has been made. In the period between June 2010 and December 2011, for example, the number of legal proceedings to halt domestic violence in Brazil increased by 106.7 per cent, according to a survey by the Brazilian National Justice Council.

By understanding the social role of each citizen, Legião da Boa Vontade is contributing towards training girls, boys, men and women who are responsible for

and aware of their own rights and duties, offering them the opportunity and the conditions to be able to develop themselves in a comprehensive way. The organization's strategic axis for promoting a solidary, altruistic and ecumenical society is evident in the innovative character of its achievements in the field of formal and informal education. Whether it is in its teaching network, or in its social assistance programmes and projects (developed in Brazil and in its autonomous bases in Argentina, Bolivia, Paraguay, Portugal, the United States of America and Uruguay), or in the multimedia educational-content broadcasts on both national networks and the Internet, Legião da Boa Vontade always follows its own educational line, comprising the pedagogy of affection (for children up to 10 years of age) and the ecumenical citizen pedagogy (from 11 years of age). This teaching philosophy works to ally feeling — the potential of the heart — to cognitive development, the intellect. With its own methodology, this philosophy includes a series of effective and replicable strategies for awareness-building and learning.

The organization's educational philosophy was created by Paiva Netto, who sees education as the pivotal point in the fight against the culture of fear, indifference and violence, and something that is capable of breaking the cycles of aggression against women that are perpetuated over the generations. Thus, ethical, moral and universal values, based on charity and solidarity, permeate the social techniques employed by Legião da Boa Vontade. As its President explains: "Statistics alone, if devoid of higher feelings in their analysis and use, cannot prevent the cunning activity of corruption and its correlations. To undertake charity [in education] is to re-educate creatures. Human beings must respect human beings! And this is not achieved merely with plans and decrees."

Drugs and violence against women

An aggravating factor that has been of concern to the Brazilian population is the increase in the consumption of crack, which specialists consider to be an epidemic, mainly among women. Brazilian authorities recognize that drug addiction is spreading rapidly and estimate that it already affects approximately 2.3 million people. In addition to the devastating consequences for the organism, other aspects raise concern. Faced with this reality, many female users are subjected to sexual exploitation and violence, thus increasing the number of people infected with HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. Most of them become mothers under these conditions and lose custody of the children, resulting from unwanted relationships. Research also reveals that treatment for chemical dependence proves to be more difficult for women than for men.

A solution proposed by specialists is the adoption of specific treatment groups for women and the inclusion of the family in the process. Legião da Boa Vontade has been involved with preventive actions and for decades has been waging the campaign "Don't use drugs. To live is better!", which consists of promoting educational events and workshops in schools and in several other civil society organizations, in addition to introducing the content as a cross-cutting theme in the organization's socio-educational programmes and projects. A milestone in the history of this work was the holding, 20 years ago, of a major event on the subject in São Paulo, Brazil. According to official data, 150,000 people attended the event, which was also heavily supported by artists and the media.

Legião da Boa Vontade is also involved with actions directed towards the female gender in its teaching units and social assistance community centres, the highlight being the learning and interaction groups guided by professionals dedicated to sociocultural inclusion and the strengthening of the socio-affective ties of girls, women and elderly women. Workshops and educational talks are held, with support from a technical team comprising a social worker, a psychologist, educationists and social educators, in cooperation with the organization's partners and volunteers. These activities provide guidance on how to improve family income, clarifications on women's rights, and notions of citizenship and a culture of peace. All of this helps prevent domestic violence and promote family harmony. Besides this, the interaction groups also encourage an exchange of experience for solving crucial questions relating to the communities that are being helped and that are frequently marked by high indices of social vulnerability. Among the main points highlighted are family planning and the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases.

Action at early infancy

Another important social initiative of the organization is the Baby Citizen programme, which assists pregnant women who find themselves in a socially vulnerable situation. Right from the prenatal phase, the work carried out in this programme raises the awareness of the pregnant woman and her companion with regard to strengthening the tie between mother and child. It offers monitoring at all stages of the pregnancy, supplementary nourishment, advice on health and breast-feeding, music therapy, and nursing and hygiene care. The baby receives help from the womb until the age of one, a period that is considered fundamental for its health. In the cities where Legião da Boa Vontade has primary education schools, this work benefits children from the age of four months. These actions help foster female autonomy and family cohesion, as well as considerably reducing the risks of violence against children.

Legião da Boa Vontade has therefore joined forces to help in the fulfilment of the eight Millennium Development Goals, especially those related to empowering women, putting an end to discrimination and violence against them. In this regard, Paiva Netto states: "The role of women is so important that, even with all the obstacles offered by a chauvinist male culture, no organization that wishes to survive — whether religious, political, philosophical, scientific, business, or a family — can dismiss her support. Now, women, when graced by the divine breath, are the soul of everything. They are the soul of humanity, the good root, the basis of civilizations, the defence of human existence."