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Statement submitted by International Federation of Social Workers, 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

The International Federation of Social Workers supports the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, which is the theme of the sixty-fourth session of the Commission on the Status of Women.

The International Federation of Social Workers represents three million social workers in 128 countries (International Federation of Social Workers, 2019). The aims of the International Federation of Social Workers are to promote social work as a profession, establish national social work associations, and support social worker involvement in planning, policy, and training all within a sustainable framework (International Federation of Social Workers, 2006). The International Federation of Social Workers is in continual collaboration with like-minded international organizations for the purpose of endorsing and advancing the tenets of social work, including a commitment to promote social and economic equalities, promote the dignity and worth of peoples, work towards environmental sustainability, and strengthen recognition of the importance of human relationships (Global Agenda, 2012) – values that are congruent with the Sustainable Development Goals. The International Federation of Social Workers works on behalf of women of all ages, socioeconomic status, ethnicities, sexual orientations, nationalities, abilities, religions, and races. Poverty, the environment, education, health, and violence against women all limit, marginalize, and exclude women from equality.

Poverty

Poverty is a multidimensional issue, and as such, requires a multidimensional response. Women in poverty urgently need greater economic opportunity and adequate mechanisms of economic and social support bolstered by social protection policies, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure (UN-Women, 2018), and resources that do not require them to depend on a husband's assets and enable them to care adequately for family members who might depend on them (International Federation of Social Workers, 2013).

Access to transportation, affordable quality healthcare services, and daycare is essential for increasing the wages and quality of life of women in formal and informal employment (UN-Women, 2018). In addition, gender parity in wages, coupled with fair pay and rights and protections for all workers, are essential components in tackling gender equality. The International Federation of Social Workers has adopted the policy that social protections are a human right and calls on governments and civil society to promote inclusive and comprehensive social protection systems for all (International Federation of Social Workers, 2016).

Employing women in jobs that offer decent wages, benefits, and protections relates to Sustainable Development Goals 1, 2, and 8. A promising practice in social work that addresses these overlapping issues is occurring in the development and promotion of community-based, worker-owned, childcare cooperatives in which poor immigrant women are able to increase their pay, decrease their working hours, and govern their own business (Matthew & Bransburg, 2017).

Environment

Social workers advocate across the world on environmental injustices that affect marginalized populations. Indigenous peoples in particular have been subjected to environmental injustices such as drilling for oil in Standing Rock in the United States and mining projects in South America. Social workers advocate and seek sustainable solutions that benefit all populations. Social workers have been involved in

developing and participating in environmental justice projects around the world that promote economic and social justice for all.

One example of this is a project in a developing country that has provided a structured and safer means for communities to make products that increase their economic and community health and protect the environment. In this project social workers partner with local institutions to mobilize educational, economic, social empowerment, and environmental health. An empowerment-based ‘train the trainer’ model is used. In this context, social workers are involved in both direct practice and administrative tasks such as forming partnerships. This approach encompasses Sustainable Development Goal 8, 11, 15 and 17.

Education and Training

Education and training for women and girls is a social protection that has the potential to lead to autonomy, decent work conditions, and economic growth. Of the 750 million adults that are illiterate, two thirds of them are women (UNESCO, 2017). International Federation of Social Workers views education as a basic human right, which is in alignment of Sustainable Development Goal 4.

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action states that “progress was achieved in women’s and girls education and training at all levels, especially where there was sufficient political commitment and resource allocation.” In many places in the world, social workers facilitate safe environments for children and their parents to learn. Educating women of their rights as women and their rights as workers through safe and effective structures enable women to execute their rights and further empower women and girls.

Equal educational and job opportunities for women serve as both a form of empowerment and a strategy for global sustainability, which is aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 8. When women and girls are educated and provided with access to decent work, life choices and opportunities expand as they can live outside the constructs of traditional gender roles. Equal education promotes significant opportunities for social and economic development, leads to greater representation, and overall empowers women and girls.

Health

Denial of adequate health services to women is a human rights violation. Gender disparities in health and in access to health care persist worldwide. Women’s and girls’ vulnerability is heightened by their lack of access to reproductive and maternal health care and by having to care for the majority of child- and family-related work. When health care is inaccessible to or inadequate for family members, women and girls are additionally burdened picking up the slack by taking on the care of the sick, disabled, and elderly. Social workers support individuals and families who are unable to access health care. They work with communities to advocate for health care needs and contribute to healthcare programming and policy.

The International Federation of Social Workers advocates for women and girls’ access to the full range of reproductive health care services, as well as maternal health (International Federation of Social Workers, 2012), and supports educating and providing women with safe physical and mental health care for themselves and their families. This aligns with Sustainable Development Goal 3.

Violence

Violence against women and girls is perpetrated through the prevalence of forced marriage, the threat of honour killings, domestic violence, female genital

mutilation, sexual violence, and human trafficking (International Federation of Social Workers, 2016). Women are subject to violence in their homes and through migration, fleeing violence in the country of origin, in transit to a new country, and upon relocation in the destination country.

Social workers provide services around the globe that support women and girls who experience violence and also work with the offenders to change these behaviours (International Federation of Social Workers, 2016). An innovative project to assist survivors of violence the Food Incubator, piloted a comprehensive model for addressing violence against women by providing skills training and income-generating opportunities to women who are survivors of domestic violence, while also providing them with essential services, such as psychosocial support and social workers who assist them in accessing legal aid (UN Women, 2018).

Violence against women prevents women from realizing their rights to life, dignity, and development. When women are provided with services to recover from violence and skills to become economically independent, they have options to improve their future (UN Women, 2018).

Recommendations

The International Federation of Social Workers supports the Commission on the Status of Women with the following recommendations on female empowerment and gender equality as related to sustainable development. Since each concern is interrelated, it is recommended that partnerships and coalitions between the United Nations and civil society are supported and developed:

- Implementation of policies that provide educational and economic opportunities for decent work, supported by inclusive and comprehensive social protection systems for all, with a special attention to the unique challenges faced by women and girls.
- Development and maintenance of sustainable programs that protect women in the environment.
- Education and training to promote literacy and education, including human rights and workers' rights literacy for women and girls, with the assistance of political commitment and resource allocation.
- Action towards supporting and creating policies and programs that enable the physical, mental, sexual, and reproductive health of women and their families.
- Implementation of social and economic development programs that promote the removal of harmful or violent practices against women and support valuing and supporting women and girls.