

Commission on the Status of Women
Fifty-fifth Session
22 February -4 March 2011

Item 3 (a) (i) 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: access and participation of women and girls to education, training, science and technology, including for the promotion of women’s equal access to full employment and decent work

Statement submitted by the NGO Committee on Mental Health, on behalf of the International Council of Women non-governmental organization in general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council; and International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies, International Association of Applied Psychology, International Association of Schools of Social Work, International Council of Psychologists, International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences, The World Council of Psychotherapy, World Federation for Mental Health, International Federation of Women Lawyers, International Federation of Women in Legal Careers, non-governmental organizations in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council..

We, the international Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, and members of the NGO Committee on Mental Health, working under the auspices of the Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations (CONGO) in Consultative Status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council, are committed to the promotion of mental health, psychological and societal well-being, the prevention and treatment of mental illness and emotional distress, and the improvement in the delivery and quality of mental health services through advocacy and education at the United Nations.

The importance of maintaining full mental health for all people is recognized by the World Health Organization in its Constitution when it states that “health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity; the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being without distinction of race, religion, political belief, economic or social condition; and that the health of all peoples is fundamental to the attainment of peace and security and is dependent upon the fullest cooperation of individuals and States.” Historically, mental health has been overlooked or minimized in discussions at the UN.

We agree that access and participation of girls and women of all ages to education and training is essential in providing them with full employment opportunities. It is imperative that we confront

the attitudes and mores that perpetuate gender-based educational inequity and seek to remove barriers which prevent girls and women from fully engaging in the workplace and the community.

Education and physical and mental health are integrally connected. There are serious psychological consequences if girls and women are prevented from obtaining an education. These consequences are life-long if women's intellectual growth is stunted. There are 120 million school-age children in the world who are deprived of their right of education, and who may suffer loss of self-esteem among other psychological problems.

Education empowers girls and women of all ages to resist violence and assert themselves. Lacking marketable skills, uneducated women cannot obtain decent work, are perceived as an

economic burden, and remain vulnerable to violence. Educated women are more likely to reinvest resources in the health and education of their children and participate in political discussions thereby improving the function of government and civic institutions. Girls who are literate are more likely to teach their mothers and grandmothers to read and write.

Consistent with the release of the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) State of the World Population 2010 Report, "From Conflict and Crisis to Renewal: Generations of Change", the WHO 2010 report on Mental Health and Development, and the goals of the UN Security Council Resolution 1325, education is necessary to promote resilience, renewal and redefining of roles between boys and girls and men and women to end sexual violence against women and girls in armed conflict and to encourage greater participation by women in peace-building initiatives.

The World Medical Association declared at its annual Assembly in Vancouver, Canada, that violence against women and girls has become a worldwide institutionalized phenomenon and a major public health crisis. Among the consequences of violence and abuse of women and girls are numerous debilitating mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, chronic grief and despair, and long-lasting effects of post traumatic stress disorder. Uneducated and mentally ill women and girls are doubly stigmatized and isolated. Suicide is the second leading cause of premature death in women.

The physical and mental health of mothers and their children benefit greatly when women are educated. Fertility rates and maternal and infant mortality rates are lower in societies where educated women have smaller, healthier and better-educated families. Educated women insist on education for all of their children, but particularly for their daughters. At the 2010 UN DPI/NGO Conference in Melbourne, it was noted that at least 340,000 women die each year of pregnancy-related causes, including from the lack of trained health care professionals during childbirth. Women not only deserve adequately trained healthcare providers throughout childbirth, but also are the largest untapped potential to become those educated providers.

The World Bank reports that girls' education is associated with increased income for their families. If there is only a one percent increase in the number of women with a secondary education, annual per-capita income grows 0.3 percent annually. This growth is significant not only for women and their families but also for the global economy. Mental health is an integral component of a comprehensive approach to access of women and girls to employment.

The following recommendations are essential for promoting education and mental health and increasing the well-being of girls and women of all ages. We respectfully request the implementation of the following action priorities.

Recommended Action Priorities:

- Women of all ages must have full access to education and training in order to obtain decent employment, and thereby reduce high levels of poverty and disease.
- It is essential for women and girls of all ages to be educated in order to facilitate their physical, mental, and reproductive health and well-being.
- Cultural attitudes of both men and women must be changed through education in order to prevent violence against girls and women, to prevent HIV AIDS and other diseases, to prevent forced early marriages, trafficking and forced prostitution and to promote gender equity.
- The worldwide bias against women in science, math, technology, and related fields must be eliminated to facilitate their entry into all spheres of employment opportunities.
- Adequate culturally appropriate mental health screening, counseling, and ongoing services for women and girls with chronic mental illness must be developed in close collaboration with the communities served.
- Adequate funding for training and retraining health workers and teachers with particular focus on opportunities for women is essential for an improved infrastructure for the health and education sectors.
- Ongoing quality monitoring and evaluation of existing and new educational programs and services is necessary.

Contact: Dr. Elizabeth Carll, Chairperson, NGO Committee on Mental Health

email: mentalhealthngo@optonline.net

For more information, visit our Website: <http://www.mentalhealthngo.org>