

UN Update - Sister Helen Martinez
IPA UN Statement on Sustainable Development - October 2014
Submitted to UN by Sister Helen Martinez and Sister Elsa Muttathu

Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action

Statement by International Presentation Association of the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary with special Consultative Status with the ECOSOC to the 59th Session of Commission on the Status of Women (CSW59). October 2014

Priority Theme: Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, including current challenges that affect its implementation and the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women.

As we look back on the 20 years of the Beijing platform for Action, International Presentation Association of the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary recognize the achievements made by the member states, civil society and local communities towards the realization of the Beijing Declaration. We are mindful of the challenges which persist despite significant activity since 1995 including: violence against women, women's under-representation in key decision-making roles particularly but not only in politics, ongoing gender segregation in education especially in Science, Mathematics, Engineering and Technology; and in the labour market, women's over-representation as care providers within the family and the vulnerabilities of women and girls affected by migration, trafficking and conflict situations.

Women, and indigenous women in particular, are seen as the face of poverty in many countries. To reverse this trend, women need to have access and control of productive resources such as ownership of land and property as well as enhanced practical and technical skills. As an organization extensively involved in education, we see education at all levels, according to the interest and aptitudes of girls, with equal access to higher and technical education as an imperative.

We are concerned about the lack of poverty eradication programmes geared specifically to the female population. High employment of women is elicited by the economic necessity of the dual income model of households and the social and cultural environment of the country. Women want to be employed because it enables them to be independent and able to support their families. Pay differences between the two genders tend to be lower than the average wage of men. Three principles are to be compared here: equal pay for equal work, equal pay for work of equal value and equal job opportunities for all, irrespective of gender.

We affirm solidarity groups among women through neighborhood economic programs, family farming and cooperatives. International Presentation Association has been instrumental in setting up a hydroponics garden in Peru to combat malnutrition and create employment, by teaching the community how to grow their own food. Members of our organization helped people secure tenure for land rights and access to water. In Zambia the organization worked with local community in building a dam that supports the farming needs of a whole village. Our education and women empowerment programs in the countries where we work have shown that, provided with education and skills, women contribute to sustainable economies and coherent societies. We affirm the efforts by some governments to carry out the reform of labor law via fulfilling the principle of equal treatment of men and women in employment, vocational training, job promotion, wages, as well as in working conditions. Amendments need to be made in order to strengthen the principle of equal treatment in employment by setting a ban on publishing job advertisements that would be including whatever limitation in respect to race, color, language, gender, ethnicity, age, religion, political or other thinking, political adherence, trade union activity, membership to nationality or ethnic group, or another status.

Adolescent pregnancy, poor infrastructure and limiting cultural practices can lead to an early end to formal education and contribute to women's risk of poverty. This is an area that calls for greater cooperation between Departments of Education and Skills to ensure that post primary schools accommodate young mothers to enable them to complete their education.

Nongovernmental organizations like Centre where Adolescents to Learn to Love and Serve [CALLS] in Dominica that provides services to at risk young people between the ages of 16 and 22, is a good example for bridging the gap. Comprehensive sexual education programs in schools and life skills can go a long way in building women's confidence and agency.

Women's mental and physical health is a priority that needs attention. A study done by Young Women's Voices on pregnancy care in Australia revealed the following facts. Pregnancies among aboriginal women between the ages of 16 and 21 years were six times that of the non aboriginals. Senior aboriginal women recommended sexual and reproductive health for aboriginal children in primary school years. They also recommended a culturally sensitive health care system that respects their need for privacy as well as the community support systems. Here again a strong collaboration between the governments and community based organizations can play a proactive role as community based organizations have the capacity to train local health workers and innovate on community's healing practices providing correct information.

The 1954 UN Convention on the political rights of women afforded equal rights for women to vote, to hold offices and to access public services. We are happy to note that 34 countries have 30% - 60% representation for women in their governments. But in many countries, despite their high level of educational attainment, women remain underrepresented in decision making roles, most notably in politics. There is ample evidence to show that when there is a high representation of women in elected governments they tend to enact legislations that are child and

family friendly and socially beneficial as in the case of Rwanda. We would urge governments to make a commitment to increase women's participation in decision-making roles and in politics.

Despite the many UN instruments and national legislations to curb violence against women, domestic violence against women and sexual violations in the workplace and public places continue to be widespread in all social classes and regions of the world. Apart from easy access to justice, there also needs to be accommodations for those women who have had to leave their homes. Support from government and community partnerships can make this happen. Partnership with civil society in this respect could include crisis intervention centers, short stay homes and emotional support.

We share the concern of the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women over the incarceration of women and the increasing number of indigenous women in prisons and lack of legal support which makes access to justice difficult for them.

We are encouraged by Peru on its ratification the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women on 9 April 2001 and its adoption of numerous programmes, laws, plans and policies for the advancement of women, including the Educational Development of Rural Girls and Adolescents Act. During the past 20 years, Zambia has also created the Ministry of Chiefs and Traditional Affairs and appointed women in key positions.

Challenges:

- High rate of illiteracy among women.
- Dissemination of information in the local language and translation facilities.
- Broadcasting farming programs on radio.
- Providing women headed households and women the right to own land and not be encumbered by cultural traditions.
- Conservation farming using the wisdom of indigenous peoples.
- Respecting the rights of indigenous peoples and recognizing the wisdom of indigenous women and support their traditional practices of harmonious relationship with nature.
- Improving procedures for obtaining and disseminating data, and ensure that they reflect the gender dimension with more transparency and sensitivity.
- Protecting the Human Rights of migrant women, women and girls who are trafficked and providing them social protection regardless of their immigration status, including access to health care, Social security, protection, justice and remedies.

Recommendations:

1. Recognize Women's Human Rights and build their agency to promote peaceful and transformative communities and sustainable environment through life long education and opportunity.
2. Enact and implement with women's participation legal and social measures to prevent

violence against women in the domestic and public spaces and foster conditions that will facilitate mental health of women and families.

3. Enact and adhere to national legislations that afford women equal participation and leadership in the social economic and political processes.
4. Ensure gender sensitive work environment and share the care burden of women through cultural transformation.
5. Implement International Labour Organization Recommendation 202 on Universal Social Protection floors to protect women in vulnerable situations.
6. Strengthen the legal framework and institutional mechanisms for gender equality.
7. Integrate traditional cultural practices in the health system, for instance, in certain tribal communities there is a revival of the use of tribal medicines. Tribal women are trained as community health workers and are taught to maintain herbal gardens in every house hold.
8. Ensure the participation of women and local communities in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

The statement is endorsed by the following ECOSOC accredited organizations:

Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, Dominican Leadership, Edmund Rice International, Society of Catholic Medical Missionaries , The Grail, UNANIMA International.

NOTE: While Helen's and Elsa's names are included here for your information, such document submissions are made without individuals' names attached.