



SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE
BOLLETTINO

HOLY SEE PRESS OFFICE BUREAU DE PRESSE DU SAINT-SIÈGE PRESSEAMT DES HEILIGEN STUHLS
OFICINA DE PRENSA DE LA SANTA SEDE SALA DE IMPRENSA DA SANTA SÉ
BIURO PRASOWE STOLICY APOSTOLSKIEJ دار الصحافة التابعة للكرسي الرسولي

N. 0449

Martedì 06.07.2010

STATEMENT OF THE HEAD OF THE HOLY SEE DELEGATION TO THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL ON GENDER EQUALITY AND EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN (NEW YORK, 1 JULY 2010)

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Here below the statement by H.E. Archbishop Celestino Migliore, Apostolic Nuncio, Head of the Holy See Delegation to the Economic and Social Council Substantive Session for 2010, High-level Segment, about implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to gender equality and empowerment of women (New York, 1 July 2010):

Mr. President,

This year's substantive session is particularly pertinent leading up to the long expected World Summit on the MDGs. All women and girls who are affected by the MDGs look forward towards an increased recognition of their value and equality as well as their dignified role in development. Any deliberation on the matter will be incomplete without ensuring the advancement of women, who are dynamic agents of development in the family, society and the world.

Ever since world leaders committed their governments to the ambitious objective of attaining the MDGs, some remarkable progress has been achieved in mainstreaming women's perspectives in development both in multilateral and national policies. Even those countries lagging behind in many aspects of development are giving more prominence to the role of women in public life, especially in the political arena.

The empowerment of women presupposes universal human dignity and, thus, the dignity of each and every individual. The notion denotes complementarity between man and woman, which means equality in diversity: where equality and diversity are based on biological data, expressed traditionally by male and female sexuality, and on the primacy of the person. It concerns also roles to be held and functions to be performed in society. In that regard, equality is not sameness, and difference is not inequality.

Empowerment of women for development means also recognition of the gifts and talents of every woman and is

affirmed through the provision of better health care, education and equal opportunities. Empowering women and respecting their dignity mean also honoring their capacity to serve and devote themselves to society and to the family through motherhood which entails a self-giving love and care-giving. Altruism, dedication and service to others are healthy and contribute to personal dignity. If domesticity can be considered a particular gift of mothers in cultivating a genuine intrapersonal relationship in the family and society, then family-friendly working arrangements, shared family-care leave and redistribution of the burden of unpaid work will be given the attention they rightly deserve.

The Holy See notes with concern that inequalities between individuals and between countries thrive and various forms of discrimination, exploitation and oppression of women and girls persist, which must be addressed by the provision of adequate social protection measures for them, as appropriate to national contexts.

In the health sector there is a need to eliminate inequalities between men and women and increase the capacity of women to care for themselves principally by being afforded adequate health care. Scientific studies have shown remarkable improvement in the reduction of maternal and infant mortality, revealing the importance of complementary investing in other areas relevant to women and girls including nutrition, general health and education. The real advancement of women is not achieved by concentrating on a particular health issue to the neglect of others but by promoting their overall health which necessarily includes giving more attention to addressing women-specific diseases.

Women's economic empowerment is essential for the economic development of the family and of society. Access to land and property, credit facilities and equal opportunities for financial services for women will help ensure their economic stability. In this process, the whole household and community must support their entrepreneurship. The ethical dimension of their development and economic empowerment as well as their service to the family must not be overlooked.

Tragically, violence against women, especially in the home and work place, and discrimination in the professional field, even on the pay and pension scale, are growing concerns. Through adequate legal frameworks and national policies, perpetrators of violence must be brought to justice and women must be afforded rehabilitation. Women and girls must be guaranteed their full enjoyment of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights including equal access to education and health.

My delegation supports the initiatives in favour of the rights in particular of women migrants and refugees and women with disabilities. Human rights learning campaigns especially for girls and women must be promoted, even from early school days and also through non-formal education. Civil society and NGOs, women's associations and faith-based organizations can contribute a great deal in human rights learning and in quality education.

In concluding, Mr. President, the more the dignity of women is protected and promoted, the more the family, the community and society will truly be fostered.

Thank you, Mr. President.

[01016-02.01] [Original text: English]

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