Economic and Social Council

Commission for Social Development
Sixtieth session
7–16 February 2022
Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and
the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly:
priority theme: inclusive and resilient recovery from COVID-19
for sustainable livelihoods, well-being, and dignity for all:
eradicating poverty and hunger in all its forms and
dimensions to achieve the 2030 Agenda

Statement submitted by Concepts of Truth, Inc. and The Foundation for Preventing Youth Violence, 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.

Please recycle

Statement

Ending poverty in all its forms is, as the United Nation's Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) acknowledges, "the greatest global challenge." According to the UN's report on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), poverty is multidimensional; it not only includes hunger and malnutrition but also limited access to education, social discrimination, and exclusion, as well as the lack of participation in decision-making. Material poverty thus coexists with, and can also result from, vulnerability and isolation, and it is these forms of emotional poverty which can directly result from violence in its various forms.

Violence has increased dramatically due to COVID-19, and as new variants of violence emerge, particularly in the areas of online sexual violence and cyberbullying, women and youth become more and more at risk. Violence not only impacts women and youth mentally and physically but also affects their human dignity and well-being and impedes peaceful and inclusive societies (SDG 16). We thus urge the UN and all member states to work together to reduce violence and ensure that vulnerable individuals can flourish in their respective communities.

According to Chamorro-Premuzic, T. and Wittenberg-Cox, A., during the pandemic, sexual violence skyrocketed, resulting in a multitude of unwanted pregnancies and abortions. Natalia Kanem, executive director of the UN Population Fund, predicted on August 1, 2020 in The Lancet that there could be up to seven million additional unintended pregnancies worldwide because of the devastating effects of COVID-19 on women and girls, and of those pregnancies, an estimated sixty-one percent will likely end in abortion. Such devastating effects of sexual violence and emotional poverty in turn are found to increase women's vulnerability to sexual exploitation.

While for some women, abortion may provide short term relief from the physical and emotional stress of carrying an unexpected or unwanted child to term, abortion has significant physical, mental and spiritual consequences which often result in the vulnerability, isolation and emotional suffering that comprise emotional poverty and loss of dignity. Numerous global studies have confirmed the negative short and long-term health impact of abortion, including numerous psychiatric complications such as severe depression and suicide. An extensive study published by The DeVeber Institute for Bioethics and Social Research in 2015, "Complications: Abortion's Impact on Women," found that women who aborted their first pregnancy were 65 percent more likely to fall into clinical depression than those who had the child, while post-abortive women were at much higher risk for suicide than women who completed their pregnancies.

These complex expressions of emotional poverty following the pandemic require a multidimensional solution that includes health care and education (SDG's 3 and 4). Teaching individuals to explore and evaluate options is a necessary tool for decision making and evaluating risks. Concepts of Truth, Inc., a U.S. faith-based non-government organization (NGO), thus aims to educate the whole person to make healthy life choices that empower future generations through its adult counselor training curriculum, Concepts of Recovery: The Journey, and through its student sexual health curriculum, Concepts of Sexual Health, Sex & You. The Journey curriculum trains adult counselors to direct individuals of all faiths and backgrounds through the grieving process as they learn about forgiveness, peace and comfort and find spiritual and emotional relief from the sorrow and possible trauma following abortion and miscarriage. For students, the Concepts of Sexual Health, Sex & You curriculum relies on medical facts and research to transmit the truth about core values, self-worth, dignity, responsibility, and the science of sex to empower youth and

families to make informed life choices in relationships which affect the whole person's present and future well-being.

After the pandemic, this emotional poverty has been transferred to an unspecified number of youths online, appearing as cyberbullying. Cyberbullying has increased in various types such as cyber harassment, exclusion, stalking and sexting, but current domestic and foreign laws do not cover all of them. Online hate speech causes a permanent stigma, indiscriminately trampling on the dignity of youths around the world, and even raising suicides. According to a nationwide survey carried out by the Blue Tree Foundation in 2021, cyber violence has risen more than threefold compared to the previous year. As most schools switched to online classes during the pandemic, physical violence shifted to online relational violence, allowing cyber-perpetrators to bully their victims anywhere, anytime with anonymity. And since online bystanders often remain silent, their silence is misunderstood as support for the perpetrators, making it harder for victims to ask for help and making cyber violence difficult to regulate and restrain.

The Blue Tree Foundation (Foundation for Preventing Youth Violence), a youth NGO from the Republic of Korea, believes that quality education is an effective solution to combat cyber violence in keeping with SDG 4. Thus, the Blue Tree Foundation has developed an educational curriculum for all ages to prevent cyber violence. Cyber Jungle Guardian, the Blue Elephant, educates teachers, instructors, parents, youth, and citizens to raise awareness at the early age. Specifically, the project teaches instructors and parents how to effectively detect and respond to cyber violence; it encourages youth to be defenders instead of bystanders; and it supports citizens who wish to promote an anti-bullying online culture.

Effective institutions (SDG 16) are also essential for rooting out cyber violence. As we witnessed the decrease of school violence after establishing anti-bullying laws in the Republic of Korea, cyber violence also needs a regulatory structure. The Blue Elephant thus proposed the following policies with members of Congress.

1. Implement protective measures such as separating the victims and the perpetrators mentally and physically immediately upon recognition of the occurrence of the violence

2. Reinforce the punishment of perpetrators such as establishing juvenile courts and a new punishment clause for cyber violence

3. Expand the time amount to complete the education program for cyber sexual violence treatment

4. Strengthen the prevention of youth cyber violence by expanding mandatory education for preventing school violence

5. Establish international cooperation for the shared goal

For those seeking to heal from past trauma, emotional poverty can be lifted, peace can be found, and dignity restored when symptoms are recognized and treated. In the same way that nations have worked together to overcome COVID-19, both abortion and cyber violence need international partnerships (SDG 17) to advance education and cultural awareness to help their victims. Therefore, as we work together towards eradicating all forms of violence and poverty including emotional poverty, we call on the United Nations and member states through the Commission for Social Development to:

1. Understand rapidly changing patterns and forms of violence;

2. Establish systems and organizations to promptly detect and respond to forms of invisible cyber violence and emotional poverty; and

3. Encourage the spread of a social culture that actively intervenes in the causes of emotional poverty.

––––––––––––––