



A parliamentary perspective on discrimination and violence against the girl child



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Combating discrimination and violence against the girl child: A holistic and human rights based approach

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Ladies and Gentlemen;

Democracy is spreading and consolidating, so is the role of parliaments in monitoring the implementation of the human rights of its constituencies including the rights of the girl child. Parliaments are, therefore, significant players in our global quest to reach gender equality, to eliminate all forms of discrimination against the girl child and to empower her. Discrimination against the girl child strikes at the heart of our societies and involves multiple issues; only through a multidisciplinary approach can efficient progress be achieved in eliminating such discrimination. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) define discrimination against women and children respectively, and establish legal obligations for States Parties to eliminate it.

Many of the key development issues that States endure today have an important gender dimension. An understanding of gender norms and roles is thus essential to the design of development policies, and to shaping the structure of laws. I cannot over emphasize the crucial need to adopt a human rights multidisciplinary approach when dealing with the rights of vulnerable groups including the girl child; in which such an approach would make a paradigm shift to the entire society. It is only then that we can recognize that she has civil & political rights along with social, economic and cultural rights as provided for by the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

I am trying to explain the interdependence and indivisibility of rights, such as the strong correlation between women's education and improved gender indicators; and that it is of primary importance to address the gender gap in education. Furthermore, making education free and available to children is not enough; governments must ensure the demand side, which will link the education to poverty alleviation, to gender discrimination, to harmful traditional practices, to the culture of dialogue and respect for the views of the child, and that the girl has the right to enjoy all the rights without any discrimination.

To ensure that children actually go to school and remain in schools without drop out. The educational system should not only cater for the needs of the mainstream of children. Marginalized children, even if in small numbers must not remain invisible. Education and health care must cater for their needs. To

ensure their access to such services, we need to work on multiple fronts such as advocacy and poverty alleviation.

Our experience in Egypt with girls education tells us that to design a successful program of girl's education that attracts and retains the poor, we had to work on five programs: Awareness Raising and Community Mobilization, Completion of Database, Construction of Girl's Friendly Schools, Poverty Alleviation, and Monitoring and Evaluation. We had to involve 16 line ministries and a number of NGO's; attract local female teachers with high quality training, and ensure vocational training at school, mobilize the local community around the value accrued from educating their girls. Also, giving food ration to improve the health of the girl and encourage the family to keep her at school; among other actions. Local parliamentarians need to be aware that without this package of assistive services, families will not send their girls to school.

Education plays a fundamental role in the prevention of discrimination against the girl child. With this in mind, it is necessary to review school curricula at all levels, to sensitize teachers, and to keep girls in school up until they reach higher education in order to delay marriage and other factors that are obstacles to the girls' education.

The UNSG Study on violence against children caters very much for gender violence. Parliamentarians have a role to monitor the implementation of its recommendation. The study was developed through a participatory process and has sensitized all stakeholders of the national, regional and international level.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The question that is always asked is: how can parliamentarians monitor the implementation of the rights of children?

The Convention on the Rights of the Child provides a very comprehensive tool; that provides a multidisciplinary approach in addressing the rights of the child. Parliaments and their members have a vital role to play in ensuring respect of the principles of the Convention. They have an impressive range of tools at their disposal to do so. Parliamentarians, as representatives of the people, should be aware and informed of the Committee's work so that they can take it into account in their legislative activities and relay it to their constituencies and to the public at large. Parliamentarians, as overseers of their governments, should ensure that international commitments are upheld and implemented, particularly those that fall under international human rights instruments. They can encourage their State to become party to the UN Conventions and their Protocols, as well as assist in raising awareness in these human rights instruments. They can also debate and adopt national legislation that conforms with the international standards set out by the Conventions and monitor its implementation; as well as ensuring that States Parties comply fully with the reporting obligation in the Conventions. Finally, they are entrusted with overseeing the practical implementation of the rights set out in the Convention.

The Committee on the rights of the Child, the body entrusted with monitoring the implementation of the convention, in its efforts to assist States Parties with fulfilling their obligations according to the Convention, has grouped what it termed "General Measures of Implementation". It includes, legislation; creating a well resourced and properly mandated body to oversee and coordinate the implementation by the various governmental and non governmental bodies; a time bound, national plan of action- Budgetary allocations; a solid data base on children including the most vulnerable groups, disaggregated by sex, regional disparities- Monitoring bodies such as Ombudsman for children; partnership with the civil society for the planning and implementation of the rights of the child.

Most constitutions guarantee the principle of equality before the law, and equal citizenship. Parliamentarians are urged to eliminate discriminatory provisions especially those governing family

relations which undermine constitutional rights, and compromise the status of women, and increase women's participation in the political and decision-making process

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Parliamentarians should play an active and positive role in the promotion of gender equality and to implement measures aimed at ensuring gender equality in representation, by establishing parliamentary committees on gender equality, composed of both men and women, making use of the tools of gender-budgeting analysis, ensuring the gender mainstreaming of all decisions and legislation, and allocating sufficient resources to these activities. Budgeting for children is a very crucial human rights issue. The budget is the most important policy statement of the State. Parliamentarians need to urge governments to make rights based budget tracking with a view to ensure sufficient and efficient spending for children. The development of gender sensitive national budgets would also help reduce the practice of FGM, and improve the promotion of girls' in the education system, literacy, women's and girls' empowerment and access to health services. Parliaments should systematically analyze their national budgets from the perspective of gender equality with a view to correcting inequalities and discrimination. Furthermore, in order to promote gender equality, parliamentarians are strongly urged to promote a stronger presence of women in political parties and at all levels of decision-making through the adoption, for example, of quota systems.

A tool that can also be used to assist in minimizing discrimination against the girl child is the creation of an office of an Ombudsman. This office could report to Parliament, and inquire on violations of children's rights, either at the institutional or individual level. The office could report on such violations on an annual basis in order to provide an objective view on the situation of children, and even more specifically the girl child.

In addition, development of training programs for journalists and other media staff on the importance of the non-stereotypical portrayal of women and men and girls and boys is recommended for parliamentarians, in order to prevent discrimination against the girl child. Parliaments should also work on awareness and changing mentalities, in which they are in a position to address sensitive issues and have an impact on public opinion and mentalities. Thus, cooperation with the media is vital; modern and traditional media need to be involved in all strategies aimed at addressing issues of discrimination against the girl child, through awareness, communication and information campaigns.

Governments and parliaments must take every appropriate measure, including the enactment of legislation, to end violence committed against girl children. Thus, it is necessary to focus on problems of the girl child in reviewing the impact of programs, laws and proposed bills; more sex-disaggregated and gender-sensitive data, methods and research; monitoring of the girl child's education, health and employment and monitoring of cultural communities and migration; and further awareness of, and concern for, the girl child in all advocacy efforts.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As you can see, a new agenda covering gender is necessary to achieve greater efficiency and equity within society and the economy. The goal of this agenda would be to enable women and the girl child to have greater access to opportunity. Within this framework, gender equality can be advanced by supporting the two critical pillars of good governance: (a) greater inclusiveness of women and girls in decision making, which will create a more gender-egalitarian environment in the economic and social spheres, and (b) gender accountability of institutions to advance fairness and equality.

The new gender agenda could consist of broad policy areas for addressing gender disparities; which include reviewing the legislative environment to provide consistency between the constitutional rights of

women and girls' and ordinary legislation; establishing a supportive infrastructure that will facilitate girls' participation in the public sphere; and finally, providing continued attention to education.

Let me seize this opportunity to invite parliaments to follow and support the work of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, to monitor the implementation of their governments and civil society of the Committee's Concluding Observations. I am confident that the outcome of the special session on the elimination of all forms of violence and discrimination against children will benefit greatly from the valuable input of the eminent participation of Parliamentarians. I am also confident that Parliamentarians will spare no effort to disseminate the outcome of our meetings.

Thank you for your attention.