



THE HOLY SEE

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Official of the Secretariat of State

Human Dimension Sessions of the 2010 Review Conference

30 September--8 October 2010, Warsaw, Poland

Working Session 8:

Wednesday, 6 October 2010

Promotion of Gender Balance and Implementation of the OSCE Action Plan and Relevant Commitments

Mr. Chairman,

The OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality outlines concrete recommendations towards the promotion and protection women's rights in political, economic, civil, social, and educational fields, with a view to achieving social progress and better standards of life for women and men. An authentic respect for the differences between men and women must be grounded, first of all, in their inherent and equal personal dignity as created in the image and likeness of God.

Policies designed to restore balance and fairness to social and political structures should have the practical result of persuading all people to work towards the true advancement of women. Such progress, however, must take care to link women's freedom, dignity and equality to sound moral principles. It must also lift up the high value and irreplaceable role of motherhood as an undeniable gift to the family—the basic unit of society.

Although progress has been made in this regard, more work must be done to combat gender-based violence perpetrated against women and girls, which continues unabated in all-too-many places and cultures. It takes a devastating toll on women's lives, on their families, and on society as a whole. Most societies prohibit such violence as a matter of policy, but the reality is that it occurs too often, is frequently covered up, and is in many instances tacitly condoned. Violence against women stems from perceptions, some long ingrained, which de-value and objectify females and deny their human rights. Such perceptions frequently go unchallenged, and indeed even receive tacit approval, by some societies and governments when prostitution and pornography, for example, are given free reign.

Likewise, trafficking in human beings has a particularly negative impact on women. In some cases there are women and girls who are exploited almost like slaves in their work, and not infrequently in the sex industry. The culture which encourages the systematic exploitation of sexuality is as pervasive as it is unhealthy for society and must be addressed by more than fine words. The Holy See again condemns vigorously the sexual violence that frequently has women and girls for its object, and encourages the passing of laws that will effectively defend them from such violence. Nor can we fail, in the name of the respect due to the human person, to condemn the widespread culture which encourages the systematic exploitation of sexuality and corrupts even very young girls into letting their bodies be used for profit in a worldwide multi-billion dollar industry.

In many societies, women are not considered important enough to educate, cannot inherit property and are seen as an economic drain if their family has to provide a dowry upon marriage. Recent statistics tell us that millions of girls are “missing” due to sex-selective abortions, infanticide and neglect. In some cultures, girls are exchanged for money and goods when offered as child brides, serving as a means of better economic security for their families. Treated as objects, women lack power, suffer low self esteem, and are denied education or employment opportunities

There is no doubt that we are often witnessing an ageing population, particularly within the OSCE region. Women still commonly live longer than men, but elderly women are sometimes shamefully overlooked by policy-makers and agencies that are created to look after women's concerns. It is critically important, therefore, to re-consider policies directed at elderly women, who have oftentimes cared for others in their adulthood, and who in justice should receive proper support in their turn.

The phenomenon of migration also reveals some critical challenges when it comes to women, since nearly half of the migrants are female. It often happens that women migrants become the principal source of income for their family. The most common employment opportunities for women, other than domestic work, consist in helping the elderly, caring for the sick and working in the hotel sector. These, too, are areas where just treatment must be assured for migrant women out of respect for their femininity in recognition of their equal rights.

Mr. Chairman, the Holy See is deeply concerned that women possess equal personal dignity alongside men since both are created in the image and likeness of God. The true dignity of women should be recognized, so that all women without exception will be enabled and empowered to play their vital role in the development and well being of their families, community, and society.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.