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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”

Statement submitted by Cinsel Şiddetle Mücadele Derneği, 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.



Statement

Since 2014, Cinsel Şiddetle Mücadele Derneği (CŞMD) has aimed to raise awareness about rape culture and sexual and sexualized violence, to organize workshops to make sexual violence more visible and prevent it, to conduct awareness-raising activities for the staff of institutions providing support services, and to change the rape culture and replace it with a culture of consent.

This statement has been prepared to present the current situation in Türkiye in the areas of social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and empowerment of women and girls, which are among the agreed outcomes of the 63rd Session of the CSW.

Latest Status on Gender Equality

To achieve gender equality, which is the fifth of the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, holistic policies should be implemented by states. The last project on gender equality in Türkiye was the “Enhancement of Gender Equality in Education Project” (ETCEP), a 24-month project that started on September 19, 2014, co-financed by the European Union and the Republic of Türkiye and the project was terminated in 2016. The project was targeted by some associations and conservative groups at the time and it was said that such projects would “destroy families” and “de-sexualize” children. In 2019 and the following years, comprehensive sexuality education or gender equality projects were not officially included in any state institution.

Türkiye has withdrawn from the Istanbul Convention and election promises have been announced to amend or abolish the Law No. 6284 on Combating Violence against Women, which is the domestic harmonization law of the Convention. The government and its partner politicians frequently and consistently made statements about protecting the institution of “family” on behalf of the state; all these statements were used by the government as justification for rights violations and unlawfulness against almost all kinds of individual and constitutional rights demands of women and LGBTI+. No action plan has been implemented to prevent violence against women and girls and the abuse of girls through marriage. In addition, trans women do not have full access to the support they need. At the same time, sex work is being increasingly criminalized.

There is no structured education and protection system to prevent sexual violence in Türkiye

According to UN 2030 target 5.2., all forms of violence against all women and girls, including trafficking in women, sexual and all forms of abuse, should be eliminated in public and private spaces. Article 5.6 requires universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive health rights in accordance with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, the Beijing Platform for Action and the conference outcomes of their review conferences. According to the “International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education” published by UNESCO in 2009 and revised in 2018, comprehensive sexuality education with a scientific and rights-based perspective should be included in school curricula in accordance with the age and developmental processes of children in the prevention system. Research analyzing shows that curricula from primary school to high school in the context of comprehensive sexuality education were poorly covered in the Ministry of Education's textbooks.

Considering the role of comprehensive sexuality education in preventing violence as well as the right to access to scientific knowledge, it is crucial that it is

integrated into the official curriculum and implemented across the country; however, such an implementation requires the training and supervision of experts who have the right approach and up-to-date scientific knowledge and who consider the best interests of children and youth. There is no relevant work in this regard, and in the current situation, some schools only offer seminars under the name of “Privacy Education” within the frameworks defined by religion, morality and culture.

However, as of 2023, it is still not possible to monitor what activities have been carried out regarding the actions included in the 2021-2025 National Action Plan on Violence against Women and the 2023-2028 Child Rights Strategy Document and Action Plan prepared by the Ministry of Family and Social Policies.

The concluding observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child on Türkiye's 4th and 5th Reports include a recommendation to strengthen the capacity of relevant professionals, in particular social workers, and teachers, to identify and respond effectively to incidents of violence, including sexual exploitation and abuse.

Support Systems

According to Article 40 of the United Nations the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) “General Recommendation No. 35 on Gender-Based Violence against Women” and Article 14 of CSW 63, the state's protection obligations include protecting survivors of violence and providing them with holistic support services. However, the state does not publish statistics on sexual violence cases in Türkiye, and survivors do not have access to comprehensive support (including disability, language access, etc.). The monitoring study showed that Türkiye does not provide these standards to survivors of sexual violence. Furthermore, Türkiye has not established rape crisis centers or a one-door system after sexual violence, which are binding provisions of the Istanbul Convention.

Access to Public Services

The agreed conclusions of the 63rd session emphasized women's and girls' access to public services, such as social protection mechanisms and the right to education, and called on States to allocate budgets for integrated services. Through its sexual violence hotline, the Association provides referral and counselling services to survivors of sexual violence and their relatives, informs them about their rights and available health, legal and social services, and assists them in accessing support and services. The main complaint of those calling the hotline is the lack of public services related to accessing justice. When girls are subjected to domestic violence, they have no access to support and continue to share the same environment with the perpetrator. Some of the calls received by the hotline are cases of childhood sexual abuse. Girls ask whether they have the right to file a lawsuit regarding the sexual abuse they suffered as children in order to have access to justice as an adult. Impunity in such cases is also a common practice.

An Example of the Importance of Sustainable Infrastructure: February 6 Earthquakes

The lack of sustainable infrastructure, which was one of the agreed conclusions of the 63rd Session, was seen after earthquake in Türkiye, 2023. As is known, cases of gender-based violence, human trafficking and sexual violence tend to increase after natural disasters. Article 16 of the 63rd Session clearly states this issue. It was found that in crisis and disaster areas there was a lack of existing needs, access to clean water and hygiene was very limited, and women and girls did not have access to needs such as clean water, clean underwear because the field workers were men. It has been observed that girls are more vulnerable to sexual violence and abuse while staying in

temporary shelters after the earthquake. It has also been observed that with the idea that girls who cannot continue their education will be “safe”, cases of abuse of children through marriage have increased.

Recommendations

- Public authorities should continuously update and make accessible their services on sexual violence and cooperate with civil society organizations working in that area.
- Türkiye systematically insists on not sharing data on cases of sexual violence. Disaggregated data should be shared for the last 5 years, including the number of sexual violence applications received by the institutions providing support in the field of violence in Türkiye and the support they provided.
- The measures that will be taken by the Ministry of National Education and the Ministry of Family and Social Policy to ensure gender equality in education should be explained.
- The State of Türkiye must urgently prevent the abuse of children through marriage and take relevant protection measures.

Co-signing ECOSOC Organizations:
Kırmızı Biber Derneği
Uçan Süpürge Vakfı
