



**INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANIZATION
OFFICE FOR THE UNITED NATIONS**

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**Statement by International Labour Office
Commission on the Status of Women
Fifty-seventh session**

Chairperson,
Honourable Ministers,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The priority theme for the 57th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women - Elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls (VAWG) - is close to the ILO mandate of social justice: clearly, violence against women in the workplace is at odds with ILO's goal of full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity. For decades the ILO has advised on policy and executed programmes to eliminate sex discrimination at work, including sexual harassment and gender-based violence. The 2009 International Labour Conference Conclusions instructed member States to develop policies, programmes, legislation and other measures aimed at combatting GBV. ILO's message is that the world of work is an excellent channel for both *prevention* and *remedial measures* to effectively enforce policy proscriptions.

Sex disaggregated data are scarce, but some available facts demonstrate the breadth of the problem at work. Between 40 and 50 per cent of women in European Union countries experience unwanted sexual advancements, physical contact or other forms of sexual harassment at their workplace; small surveys in Asia-Pacific countries indicate that 30 to 40 per cent of women workers report some form of verbal, physical or sexual harassment. Where daily, invidious discriminatory behaviour (such as sexual harassment and bullying because of the sex of the worker) is allowed to exist, is tolerated or brushed under the carpet, this is a sign that society needs to tackle gender-based violence more seriously.

The **Decent Work Agenda** covering employment, social protection, standards and rights at work, and social dialogue gives the overall policy framework for an integrated approach to pursue the elimination of VAWG. Four ILS have been the lynchpin for policy advice: Convention 111 is used to improve law and practice on sexual harassment (2003 General Observation by the supervisory bodies); Convention 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples requires ratifying governments to adopt special measures to ensure that indigenous workers are protected from sexual harassment (Art. 20); the Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189) bans all forms of abuse, harassment and violence (Art. 5) and the HIV/AIDS Recommendation 200 requires workplace measures to reduce the transmission of HIV and alleviate its impact by actions to prevent and prohibit violence and harassment (Para. 14). Other highly ratified texts, like the child labour and OSH Conventions, also indirectly address GBV.

UN system-wide work (ILO with other sister entities) on **social protection floors** is a practical example the role of the workplace in multi-sectoral remedial action. By guaranteeing basic income in the form of social transfers, and providing universal access to affordable social services like healthcare and housing, such floors attack the poverty underlying many situations of violence against women, and can provide critical assistance to victims directly.

ILO **tools and guides** developed over the last decade now comprise a formidable package of approaches to end violence against women at work. Sectoral dimensions have been particularly addressed e.g. the *Code of Practice on Workplace Violence in Services Sectors* and *Framework Guidelines for addressing workplace violence in the health sector* (an ILO, WHO, ICN, PSI Joint Programme).

ILO research such as *Gender-based violence in the world of work: Overview and selected annotated bibliography* (Geneva, 2011) tracks approaches to both the rights-based and “**business**” cases for addressing gender-based violence. Immediate as well as long-term disruption is caused by violence, whether domestic or in the workplace or domestic violence spilling over into the world of work. For example, in a study across several regions of the United States, three-fourths of women suffering domestic violence were harmed or harassed at their workplace by abusive spouses or partners, either on the phone or in person. Confrontation affects co-workers who step in to halt an altercation, as well as those witnessing an act of violence whether committed by a colleague, client or stranger. In addition to impacting interpersonal relations, violence can affect the way the work is organized, can reduce productivity, entail damage to equipment and ‘poison’ the working environment. Many delegates here know the oft-quoted studies on the direct financial cost to enterprises, as well as studies in the past decade demonstrating highly significant costs to the resources of the wider society: around \$13.6 billion in Australia; and £22 billion according to an England & Wales estimation.

In sum, Chair, gender-based violence in the world of work represents an obstacle to development and implies significant costs for developing and developed country economies alike. **Coherent and effective labour laws and enforcement mechanisms** are needed so that proactive laws as well as individual complaint-based mechanisms dissuade GBV; there should be consistency between labour codes and criminal, civil or family laws and other bodies of law covering not only sanctions, yes, but also incentives to ‘buy into’ the fight against violence at work based on the sex of the worker; and governments should remove obstacles to women’s access to justice, including labour justice.

Chair, ladies and gentlemen, no other form of sex discrimination violates so many fundamental human rights, as violence against women. Workplace violence and sexual harassment present a significant barrier to women accessing and progressing through the labour market, and therefore ILO will never stop working to eradicate it. ILO stands ready to assist its tripartite constituents, and to cooperate fully with the whole UN family, to ensure a world free from violence against women and girls.

Thank you.