

Women's empowerment key to society, nuncio says

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UNITED NATIONS -- Women's economic empowerment is essential for the economic development of families and society, Archbishop Celestino Migliore said July 1.

"Tragically, violence against women, especially in the home and workplace, and discrimination in the professional field, even on the pay and pension scale, are growing concerns," the Vatican's U.N. nuncio told leaders of the world body.

"Through adequate legal frameworks and national policies, perpetrators of violence must be brought to justice and women must be afforded rehabilitation. Women and girls must be guaranteed their full enjoyment of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights including equal access to education and health," he said.

Archbishop Migliore delivered the statement to the U.N. Economic and Social Council during a session about implementing international goals for women's equality and empowerment.

He said it was particularly important to discuss women's empowerment before the World Summit on the Millennium Development Goals -- targets set by the world's nations for reducing poverty and improving the standard of living of the world's poorest people.

The summit will be at the United Nations Sept. 20-22.

Archbishop Migliore noted that ever since world leaders committed their governments to the development goals, "some remarkable progress has been achieved in mainstreaming women's perspectives in development both in multilateral and national policies."

"Even those countries lagging behind in many aspects of development are giving more prominence to the role of women in public life, especially in the political arena," he said.

The archbishop stressed that empowering women means recognizing their gifts and talents and "honoring their capacity to serve and devote themselves to society and to the family through motherhood." In practical terms, he said, this recognition can be measured by how governments provide "family-friendly working arrangements, shared family care leave and redistribution of the burden of unpaid work."

He said the Vatican "notes with concern" the ongoing "discrimination, exploitation and oppression of women and girls."

"Women and girls must be guaranteed their full enjoyment of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including equal access to education and health," he emphasized.

The archbishop said women's health is a particular concern. The "real advancement of women," he said, "is not achieved by concentrating on a particular health issue to the neglect of others but by promoting their overall

health, which necessarily includes giving more attention to addressing women-specific diseases."

Regarding women's economic stability, he said women need to have access to land as well as credit facilities and financial services.

The archbishop also urged families and communities to support women's entrepreneurship. "The ethical dimension of their development and economic empowerment as well as their service to the family must not be overlooked," he added.

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