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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”: implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: financing for gender equality and the empowerment of women

Statement submitted by the Coalition against Trafficking of Women, the Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, Congregations of St. Joseph, the Dominican Leadership Conference, International Council of Jewish Women, Loretto Community, National Council of Women of the United States, Sisters of Mercy, Society of Catholic Medical Missionaries, UNANIMA International, VIVAT International, and the Worldwide Organization for Women, non-governmental organizations 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.

* E/CN.6/2008/1.



Statement

Beginning with the Fourth World Conference on Women (1995) and in the years since then, governments have made many commitments to end discrimination against women and to provide financing for gender equality. Yet, we see that the global phenomenon of the feminization of poverty continues and that, if anything, the economic gap between genders is increasing. Such an increased gap gives men even greater economic power, which underpins systemic discrimination against women, exploitation, and supports the global patterns of trafficking and prostitution.

We, NGOs in consultation with UN, long for the day when “the rights, responsibilities and opportunities of individuals will not be determined by the fact of being born male or female,” as the United Nations Office of the Special Advisor on Gender Issues describes gender equality. We support and work in grassroots gender empowerment activities toward that stage of human social development when both women and men have the same possibilities of realizing their full potential.

Achieving gender equality is essential not only for the benefit of women, but for the benefit of all peoples and each nation. Development economist Amartya Sen affirms that women are now often viewed as passive recipients of help, rather than dynamic promoters of positive social transformation. Our experiences as NGOs working to empower women across the globe support this claim. Evidence suggests that education, employment and ownership rights of women (or lack thereof) are powerful determinants of women’s ability to control their environment and contribute to economic development.

Linked with the above phenomena, which result in the rights of women not being respected to the same degree as the rights of men, we NGOs supporting global human rights are especially aware of the perverse and heinous phenomenon of the trafficking of women and children. Its incidence increases each year even as macroeconomic policies promise economic growth. Nothing casts women and girls as passive objects to be discriminated against more than being exploited as consumer chattel within an economic and social system that denies them equality.

We deplore this violence and this discrimination against women and we find ourselves obliged to point out the benefit to all of us that would come from strong actions and supportive policies to finance for gender equality as a tool to reducing human trafficking and the commodification of women and children through prostitution and other forms of sexual exploitation.

A major root cause of the trafficking of women for labour or sexual exploitation is the vulnerability created by poverty. According to the most recent report on Global Trafficking Patterns from the UN Office on Drugs and Crime “most identified human trafficking victims have been women and children who seem to be particularly vulnerable to sexual exploitation.” According to the 2007 Trafficking in Persons report published by the United States Department

of State, “Approximately 80 percent of transnational victims are women and girls and up to 50 percent are minors.”¹

Reducing women’s economic vulnerability will reduce the push factors for trafficking and the prostitution of women. It is an obvious conclusion that funding for education and funding for decent jobs with adequate compensation to provide for the needs of oneself and one’s family — is essential to reducing the trafficking of girls and women. This calls for no more than the fulfilment of MDGs 1 and 3, which seek to ensure food, shelter, clothing, safe environment, and health care — all basic elements for a secure social environment.

The economic participation of women — their presence in the workforce of the formal sector as well as unpaid domestic labour — is important not only for lowering the disproportionate levels of poverty among women, but also as an important step toward raising household income and encouraging the development of national economies.

Amartya Sen makes a compelling case for the notion that societies benefit by seeing women as dynamic promoters of social transformation. Economic participation concerns not only the actual number of women participating in the labour force, but also their remuneration on an equal basis. Worldwide, outside of the agricultural sector, in both developed and developing countries, women are still averaging slightly less than 78% of the wages given to men for the same work, a gap which refuses to close in even the most developed countries.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

We recommend that governments:

1. Include labour policy that prioritizes the development of decent jobs and adequate compensation for women. Such policy will reduce their vulnerability to exploitation through human trafficking and prostitution.
2. Commit to an agenda, developed with the participation of women who have been economically marginalized, for women’s empowerment. Such an agenda must specify policies, programmes and allocation of resources.
3. Conduct public awareness campaigns that
 - a) ensure that women and girls know about the options that are available to them through such programmes, and
 - b) commit to zero tolerance, in attitudes and policies, toward gender discrimination, particularly toward tolerating women being used as objects to be prostituted and/or trafficked.

¹ <http://www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/tiprpt/2007/82799.htm>. Introduction.

4. Regulate trade policy and business practices so that corporations take into account financing for gender equality principles. The business sector must ensure that women have decent work with equal benefits. Regulations must also ensure freedom from discrimination and harassment in the workplace.
5. Require governments to integrate a gender analysis into the negotiation stages of bilateral, regional and multilateral trade agreements so that trade liberalization factors associated with the push towards the trafficking of women are evaluated and eliminated. In some cases this may even result in incentives for corporations which ensure decent work and compensation for women at all levels of their operations.
6. Promote government ratification of the Migrant Worker's Convention.
7. Develop mechanisms of financing for gender equality which support government actions to
 - a) ensure that anti-poverty aid programmes fully integrate a gender perspective into their work, for example, by supporting micro-trade and micro-finance programmes targeting women at risk of being trafficked and by focusing on implementing the MDGs.
 - b) offer support and technical assistance to bring about the reduction of new AIDS infections by eliminating sexual exploitation of women and children through human trafficking and prostitution.
 - c) strengthen legal and social support networks for women who have been trafficked.
 - d) affirm and encourage government partnerships with NGOs that have unique expertise in the work of combating trafficking and prostitution of women and supporting victims of trafficking.