



## Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General  
18 December 2009

Original: English

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### Commission on the Status of Women

#### Fifty-fourth session

1-12 March 2010

Item 3 (a) of the provisional agenda\*

**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: review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session and its contribution to shaping a gender perspective in the realization of the Millennium Development Goals**

**Statement by the Armenian International Women’s Association, the Association catholique internationale des services pour la jeunesse feminine, the Coalition against Trafficking in Women, the Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, the Federation of American Women’s Clubs Overseas, the International Association of Schools of Social Work, the International Council of Jewish Women, the International Federation of Business and Professional Women, the International Federation of Women Lawyers, the International Federation of Women in Legal Careers, the International Presentation Association of the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Passionists International, the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, Soroptimist International, the Salvation Army, UNANIMA International, the United States Committee for the United Nations Development Fund for Women and the World Youth Alliance, 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.

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\* E/CN.6/2010/1.



## Statement

1. We, non-governmental organizations working towards the elimination of violence against women and the realization of gender equality, reaffirm the message in the Beijing Declaration, adopted by the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, that “violence against women is an obstacle to the achievement of the objectives of equality, development and peace”. Although enormous efforts have been made to address violence against women, limited progress has been made in the past 15 years to achieve the objectives set forth in the Beijing Platform for Action.

2. Trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation not only have a negative impact on the enjoyment of human rights and dignity of the victims but also impede the achievement of gender equality for all women and girls. In particular, there are serious consequences in many of the critical areas identified in the Beijing Platform for Action.

## Empowerment of women and girls

3. The Beijing Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals recognize that the empowerment and advancement of women is a priority. A significant barrier to the empowerment of women and girls is the persistence of traditional or cultural practices that portray them in negative, stereotypical ways. Paragraph 118 of the Beijing Platform for Action recognizes that “violence against women ... derives essentially from cultural patterns, in particular the harmful effects of certain traditional or customary practices ... that perpetuate the lower status accorded to women in the family, the workplace, the community and society”. If girls grow up in a culture where inferior roles are allocated to women, their potential will be limited. External and internalized beliefs can limit the options and opportunities open to women and girls and contribute to the feminization of poverty and vulnerability to violence and exploitation.

4. Prostitution, like other forms of sexual violence, arises from the historical subordination of women to men. The sex industry is built upon and maintains the low social status of women and relegates them to the role of sexual merchandise. Commercial sexual exploitation is therefore a cultural practice that perpetuates gender inequality.

5. To promote the empowerment of women and girls, Governments must eliminate all forms of commercial sexual exploitation. Paragraph 130 of the Beijing Platform for Action urges Governments and regional and international organizations to “take appropriate measures to address the root factors, including external factors, that encourage trafficking in women and girls for prostitution and other forms of commercialized sex”. A key root cause is the demand for prostitution that persists and flourishes as a result of governmental and societal acceptance of this harmful cultural practice. The demand must be addressed with comprehensive legislation that criminalizes buying commercial sex and profiting from the prostitution of others, by prosecuting buyers as well as traffickers, by educating young people about the harms of sexual exploitation and by addressing the media’s sexualization of women and girls and normalization of prostitution. Another root factor is the vulnerability of women and girls who are marginalized owing to poverty, racism or having a history of suffering other forms of gender-based violence. Providing

assistance to such vulnerable women, including housing, medical, educational, financial and mental health services, is essential in establishing a safety net for potential victims.

### **Role of men and boys in promoting gender equality and ending sexual violence**

6. The Platform for Action recognizes that gender equality cannot be achieved without the participation of men and boys. Men and boys must be educated about their responsibility to end commercial sexual exploitation. Paragraph 108 (e) of the Beijing Platform for Action urges promotion of “programmes to educate and enable men to assume their responsibilities to prevent HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases”. With regard to the elimination of violence against women, paragraph 119 of the Beijing Platform for Action states that “equality, partnership between women and men and respect for human dignity must permeate all stages of the socialization process. Educational systems should promote self-respect, mutual respect and cooperation between men and women”. Paragraph 120 of the Beijing Platform for Action states that “men’s groups mobilizing against gender violence are necessary allies for change”.

7. Unfortunately, in the past 15 years, there have been few groups mobilizing men to eliminate violence against women. Further, the role of men’s demand for commercial sexual exploitation has not been adequately addressed by most Governments, intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations. Although article 9, paragraph 5, of the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, requires States parties to adopt measures to “discourage the demand that fosters all forms of exploitation of persons, especially women and children, that leads to trafficking”, some countries have adopted policies that normalize commercial sexual exploitation through the legalization of the sex industry, thereby increasing male demand for women and girls in prostitution, which fuels the global market for sex trafficking. As long as men and boys view women and girls as commodities to be bought and sold, they will be ingrained with the idea that every woman has her price, and all women will be seen and treated as inherently unequal. There is a need for greater accountability, including criminal penalties, for buyers of prostituted sex, who not only contribute to the harm suffered by victims but also create profit incentives for traffickers. Additionally, young men and boys must receive education to counteract social pressures to engage in commercial sexual exploitation and to learn about establishing gender equality in their relationships with women and girls in their families and communities.

8. Further, despite a clear mandate, in the Beijing Platform and the Millennium Development Goals, for Governments and all other actors to address the spread of HIV/AIDS in women and girls, factors such as men’s sexual violence, which make women vulnerable to this and other sexually transmitted diseases, are still inadequately addressed. The Platform for Action requires that all actors “review and amend laws and combat practices, as appropriate, that may contribute to women’s susceptibility to HIV infection and other sexually transmitted diseases, including enacting legislation against those sociocultural practices that contribute to it, and implement legislation, policies and practices to protect women, adolescents and young girls from discrimination related to HIV/AIDS” (Beijing Platform for Action, para. 108 (b)). The practice of selling and buying women and girls for men’s sexual

use is a long-standing practice which must be addressed to reduce and eliminate the spread of HIV/AIDS.

### **Portrayal of women in the media, including pornography**

9. The Platform for Action is unequivocal that “any harmful aspect of certain traditional, customary or modern practices that violates the rights of women should be prohibited and eliminated” (para. 224). Further, the Platform requires “effective measures ... including appropriate legislation against pornography and the projection of violence against women and children in the media” (para. 243 (f)).

10. Given our increasing reliance on various technologies and the virtual and online world over the past 15 years, aggressive action is needed to ensure that stereotypical, sexualized and violent images of women and girls are eliminated in the media. The pervasiveness of and easy access to pornography, especially on the Internet, only fuels harmful stereotypes that women and girls are sexual objects. Men and boys, as well as women and girls, not only become desensitized to the sexualized violence in pornography and other media, but also view it as normal in their lives. Thus the sexualized abuse and violence that is normalized in pornography is harmful not only to the women in it but to all members of society, who learn to accept these degrading images. Moreover, the more men accept the gendered violence that is a mainstay in pornography, the more likely they are to rationalize buying prostituted sex, thus increasing the demand for sex trafficking. The media is a powerful vehicle for promoting violence against women. The past 15 years have seen a mainstreaming of entertainment, including through the Internet and video games, that glamorizes sexual abuse of women. Taking appropriate measures to eliminate harmful media messaging, as well as promoting the inclusion of positive and empowering images of women, is essential, especially to educate girls and boys on the equal role of women in society.

### **Recommendations**

11. We call on States to honor their commitments in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action by focusing on implementation aimed at eradicating violence against women. We appeal for action in the following areas:

(a) Ratifying and implementing international and regional conventions that seek to eliminate violence against women, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and its Optional Protocol, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the 1949 Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others and the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children;

(b) Training and accountability of institutional players at all levels, including police, judges, prosecutors and other community leaders, to recognize exploited women and girls as crime victims, not as immoral or criminal;

(c) Strengthening laws and policies to assist victims of gender-based violence, including rape and sexual abuse;

(d) Criminalizing perpetrators of all crimes of sexual exploitation, including buyers and procurers of prostituted and trafficked women and girls;

(e) Creating economic programmes for women at risk of being trafficked and sexually exploited and raising awareness about the danger of trafficking;

(f) Adopting immigration remedies for victims of sexual violence and exploitation, including asylum and lawful residency;

(g) Supporting educational programmes addressing prevention of sexual violence in the broader context of gender equality, including education and empowerment for women and girls, and education on the harms of sexual violence and sexual stereotypes for men and boys;

(h) Increasing medical assistance for victims of sexual exploitation and other violence, including appropriate mental health services addressing their extensive trauma, depression, anxiety and drug dependency;

(i) Rejecting legalization or normalization of sexual violence or the lack of prosecution or enforcement of laws that attempt to hold perpetrators accountable;

(j) Recognizing the role of the media and Internet in promoting sexual violence and adopting measures to combat the growing sexualization of women and girls and abuse of women and girls in the production and consumption of pornography.

12. Fifteen years ago, the global community recognized that violence against women is an obstacle to gender equality. Unfortunately, there is still much work to be done for States and intergovernmental organizations to live up to the commitments made in Beijing. Immediate and unequivocal action must now be taken to stem the tide of continued commercial sexual exploitation and increased acceptability of this form of gender-based violence.

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