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**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and
to the 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**

Statement submitted by Captive Daughters, 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.



Statement

In 1921 the League of Nations held an international conference at which 33 countries signed the International Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Women and Children. Despite widespread public education on the issue of sex trafficking and the establishment of multiple international conventions and State laws, the number of victims being trafficked all over the world is growing at an alarming rate. The Department of State of the United States of America, in its trafficking in persons report 2012, estimated that 4.5 million people were victims of sexual exploitation (sex trafficking) and 98 per cent of them were female. Females trafficked for sex are a commodity bringing in an estimated 32 billion dollars annually to the perpetrators of this heinous crime. Sex trafficking is the fastest growing business of organized crime and the third largest criminal enterprise in the world. Legal and tolerated markets for the purchase of sex create environments in which modern-day slavery is not only accepted but bolstered.

A sex market exists anywhere that sex is bought or sold. Every major city in the world and many towns and even rural areas take part in the commercialization of female sexuality. It is found in brothels, strip clubs, massage parlours, private clubs, escort services, red light districts, chat lines, websites, magazines, newspapers, phone directories, films and private homes. Female sexuality is a product being bought and sold 24/7 the world over. It is a market fuelled by demand which is met by a steady supply of vulnerable women and children. Men are the perpetrators and women and girls their most likely victims. Female sexuality is depreciated to a purchasable commodity and the woman herself becomes a replaceable object. As this dehumanization becomes ordinary and accepted by society, more sexual exploitation and criminal activity is permitted to occur. Pornography and prostitution are the vehicles that fuel demand, and demand is the reason trafficking occurs. To make lasting headway in the fight against sex trafficking, there must be substantial measures taken to quell demand.

The call by the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS for the worldwide legalization of prostitution and the repeal of all laws that prohibit adult consensual sex work, while well-intentioned, is vastly misguided. The logical foundation for this call is that criminalizing prostitution stands in the way of effective HIV responses by driving people in need of services underground. It is essential that the difference between legalizing prostitution and decriminalizing prostitutes is clear. Legalizing is State legitimization, leading to a wider social acceptance of the sex industry, which fuels demand leading to an increase in the number of prostitutes and their resulting victimization. The majority of prostitutes enter the business through force, coercion, drugs and poverty and many do not keep the money. Most who engage in prostitution do so in order to survive and are under the control of a pimp or organized crime ring. According to the United States Department of Justice, the average age of entry is between 12 and 14 years of age. The prostitute herself is a victim and needs to be respected as such. Legalizing prostitution is the same as authorizing exploitation, and this has a proven disastrous impact on society by increasing trafficking, child prostitution, organized crime and demand.

Given the facts we have today from the 77 countries that have legalized prostitution, it is an unacceptable error to recommend legalization. In contrast, decriminalizing the prostitute is not only appropriate but essential for eradicating

global sex trafficking. It is estimated that from 80 to 90 per cent of working prostitutes want out of the business and entered it unwillingly in the first place. Most have been raped and are regular victims of mental, sexual and physical abuse. They are commonly separated from their families and renounced by society and are economically dependent for their basic needs. Many prostitutes abuse or are addicted to drugs and they suffer from exceedingly low self-esteem. They are in desperate need of comprehensive social services such as health care, drug rehabilitation, rape crisis support, housing, job opportunities and other support services such as psychological counselling.

The decriminalization of the prostitute must be enacted in conjunction with the criminalization of the buyer. The focus must be on those who buy sex and who are creating the demand in the first place. Penalties must be imposed on those who purchase and those who advertise for sexual services or facilitate the selling of another. The success of the Swedish model highlights the positive results that decriminalizing the prostitute and criminalizing the buyer can have on reducing demand and subsequently on sex trafficking. It is estimated that the number of street prostitutes in Sweden has dropped by two thirds and the number of buyers has decreased by 80 per cent. The once legal brothels, massage parlours and escort services are gone. Sweden is no longer a destination country for sex traffickers owing to the absence of a sex market, the lack of demand and rigid penalties.

Buying sex is not a victimless crime as is often believed by the buyers of sex and the public at large. Public education is essential. People must be made aware of the plight of prostitutes and how buying sex feeds the global sex trade. Frequently, men using prostitutes do so to get their needs met and then go on with their lives basically unaware of their participation in the sex trafficking epidemic. They are blind to the often violent and disturbing histories of the women and children they are buying. Some buyers of sex would abstain if they knew the harsh realities behind the sex business, and even more would be deterred from using prostitutes if it were illegal and they were at risk of being prosecuted. Purchasers of sex must be subject to fines, public exposure and potentially jail time depending on aggravating circumstances. It is paramount to the fight against trafficking and for gender equality to prosecute people buying sex and to educate people, including those in the criminal justice system, about the harms of commercial sexual exploitation.

It is clear that major social change is necessary for the elimination of violence against women, and it doesn't end with prostitution. Pornography legitimates an emphasis on women as sex objects and encourages brutality and coercion. Studies have shown that after viewing pornography men have a disturbingly altered impression of rape. The acceptance of violence against women in pornography is pervasive and is seeping into the psyche of our communities. Pornography is one of the world's largest legal industries, with annual revenues of 97 billion dollars. The average age of Internet pornography exposure is 11 years of age. There is a superficial emphasis on sexuality and a desensitization which is leading to an environment that not only accepts but approves of women being abused and objectified. International consensus for the regulation of Internet pornography is long overdue. This industry is altering our collective understanding of sexuality and harming all of society in immeasurable ways.

Pornography's normalization of violence has become increasingly harmful, with younger victims and more violent acts. There is a progression from soft-core to

hard-core, and people are finding themselves sexually excited by things they had previously not considered sexual. This upgrading includes more violent, degrading and humiliating forms of sexual activities, and this demand is being fed new women and children daily. In the United States, a pornographic video is created every 39 minutes. Pornography is undeniably encouraging an appetite for children. The proliferation of child pornography is a well-documented phenomenon growing with the expansion of Internet porn. As sexually graphic material becomes the norm and sexual markets grow, views of sexuality get distorted. These sex markets reduce all women and girls to objects and brands them as prostitutes and whores. This dehumanization encourages violence and brings about a society numbed to the realities of blatant human rights abuses.

In a climate where women and girls are regularly victimized for the sexual pleasure of men, how can women the world over legitimately make any significant gains in the movement to end violence against them? The advances that are being made by the women's movement are sabotaged by the explosion of pornography and prostitution and their resulting effects of female exploitation. All countries need to be encouraged to enact legislation on prostitution emulating the successful example of Sweden. The call by the Secretary-General and the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS must be revisited. All countries must criminalize those who buy sex and those who profit from selling the sexuality of others. It is absolutely imperative that there be police investigations and evidence collecting of the criminal activity happening in the already established sex markets. There must be successful prosecutions of those engaging in sexual exploitation to deter others from entering the easy and lucrative business of sex trafficking. Law enforcement must do its part. The days of turning a blind eye to the sale of sex are over. The international community must reclaim female sexuality if there is any hope of eliminating and preventing violence against women and girls.
