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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 Sant Nirankari Mandal — Delhi, 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

Status of women

Hold women in high esteem

Sant Nirankari Mandal — Delhi

The United Nations concern for “violence against women” obviously means violent acts that are primarily and exclusively committed against women. They are similar to hate crimes, targeting a specific group with the victims’ gender as a primary bias. Female foeticide marks the climax of this crime. Identifying the gravity of the crime, the General Assembly adopted a resolution that designated 25 November as the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, in order to create worldwide awareness among Governments and organizations to effectively combat violence against women and girls through a variety of programmes.

In the Indian context, studies have shown that “patriarchy” makes women powerless in many ways — by convincing them of their inferiority to men; by making them conform to certain stereotyped roles and behaviours; by denying them control over their own bodies; by limiting their access to resources; and by restricting their opportunities to participate in decisions which affect even their own lives. The level of male response to women varies by degrees in various zones, cultures, societies and religions. In a study conducted by the United Nations Development Programme and published in the Human Development Report 1997, it was suggested that gender equality could not come about only through changes in women’s condition — it required transformation of the structures and systems which lie at the root of women’s subordination and gender inequality.

Legal measures have not proved sufficient to contain violence against women. Economic development also does not exclusively provide a basis for change in the situation. To illustrate, the example of the state of Haryana in India is worth quoting. The economic development which this state has seen during the last 40 years or so has not brought about any radical change in the status of women there. In contrast, the example of Kerala is cited to prove that economic development affects the condition of women only if it is supplemented by the level of literacy and education. This means that, primarily, self-awakening harmonizes the relationship between men and women.

With the Sant Nirankari Mandal — Delhi, self-awakening is the bedrock that provides strength to societal and cultural norms. With self-awakening, one starts perceiving the universality of peaceful coexistence in the realm of nature. Here, self-awakening stands for spiritual awakening, through the identification of “root”, the Almighty God. With the realization of the Fatherhood of God, a spontaneous by-product is the emotional and universal brotherhood of mankind, “Know One, Be One”. In the Vedas, the entire human race was visualized in the form of one human being. This view has been endorsed by all the acknowledged scriptures of the world. Keeping track of the mainstream of spirituality, the Sant Nirankari Mandal also believes and preaches that the same divine light dwells in every human being, male and female — all human beings are brothers and sisters comprising one global family, in which everyone shuns feelings of hatred, superiority, vengeance and lust on discovering that the same string of soul passes through all human beings. This

spiritual awakening brings about basic changes in one's thoughts and actions, resulting in a feeling of oneness that wipes out differences of gender.

The Sant Nirankari Mandal feels that laws, regulations and other legal measures impose external conditions on the people but do not bring about the changes in the general outlook of an individual which are necessary for internal reform. This reform can be introduced to the conscience of individuals by enlightening them about universal oneness and brotherhood. The Sant Nirankari Mandal has always been engaged in making people aware of the Eternal Truth and that it is the living revelation of the existence of the all-pervading God. When one comes face-to-face with God, the Father of every subject and object, then the feelings of ill-will towards others are eliminated, or controlled, resulting in changes in the general behaviour of a person. This changed behaviour results in creating the feelings of patience, love, tolerance, serenity and the general well-being of one and all. There remains only a human being, not a man or a woman. This is the fundamental truth around which the Sant Nirankari Mandal has knit its world of equality, love, compassion, peace, tolerance and, above all, equity. The differences between men and women give way to equality before God and before His creation.

The Sant Nirankari Mandal and its followers have always held women in high esteem, in both its organizational and sociospiritual activities, without any discrimination on the basis of gender. His Holiness Nirankari Babaji is invariably flanked by his respected mother and wife during salvation tours. The Social Welfare Department of the Sant Nirankari Mandal keeps on working for the empowerment of women to ameliorate their lot in many ways. The Mandal's principles of divinity revolve around the genderless existence of human beings. It advocates the belief that gender only facilitates God's system of reproduction, and this cannot be the basis for discrimination, exploitation or violence against women. The Sant Nirankari Mandal aims to bring together both genders and create a new social system and structure in the larger interest of mankind. In addition, at the time of Nirankari marriage, it is solemnly affirmed by the couple that both of them have equal rights and duties towards each other.

In the Sant Nirankari Mandal, caregiving is imbued in the nature of its followers. When they start seeing God in every creature, then the compass of caregiving expands to the entire universe, not only the family or the near and dear ones; they care for all. The holy message of Nirankari Baba Hardev Singh Ji Maharaj transforms human behaviour, where an inner feeling of respect for all emanates from the inner spiritual source of God. Then no scope is left for violence, through actions, thoughts and words. The disciples of the organization shed arrogance and exhibit the highest form of paying respect by touching the feet of other saints, be it men or women.

The Sant Nirankari Mandal ranks highest in the voluntary blood donation movement in the country, both in quality and quantity. The Nirankaris flood blood donation camps in response to Nirankari Baba's message that blood donation marked the organic unity of mankind, irrespective of gender, and that blood should run in human veins and not in drains. A special feature of this blood donation campaign is that Nirankari women feel equally enthusiastic about demonstrating in action the watchword of the Holy Master Nirankari Baba, who said that life took on meaning, if it was lived for others. Watching the sociospiritual activities of the Sant

Nirankari Mandal, it is generally said that it is this kind of people who can make all the difference to the society at large.

In such a spiritual environment, feelings of ill-will or hatred evaporate in the normal internal process of behavioural change without forcing one externally to shun violence and are replaced by feelings of selfless service, love towards one and all, and compassion. This is what is required to carry out a permanent change in the behaviour of the people to leave an impeccable impact, which cannot be brought out by legislation. The inner change is the basic mantra for a permanent peace in the house, the society and the world.

The menace of HIV/AIDS is thought to be the most dangerous threat to the human race. While preventive measures exist to contain it, steps are also required to be taken to face the challenges of the care and survival of the sufferers with respect, love and compassion. The Sant Nirankari Mandal, by transforming the behaviour of lust in human beings, is doing a great service to mankind in eliminating the cause of this deadly disease at its source. Simultaneously, in the eyes of the Sant Nirankari Mandal, the nursing and care of the sufferers can be ensured only by creating feelings of selfless service within society. When Governments legislate measures for fixing the responsibilities of caregiving, the Sant Nirankari Mandal is ensuring not only the equal sharing of the responsibilities for the sufferers, but also checking the spread of this dreaded disease by promoting the inner strength of self-control in the general behaviour of the common people, so that this world becomes a place for respectable, peaceful and comfortable living.

The durability of any edifice, however magnificent at the top, depends on its foundation. When the latter crumbles, the citadel falls down. One of the five basic tenets of the Sant Nirankari Mandal deals with the pious method of living in society in a sacred and safe family life, where the wife is the pivotal figure, the foundation, around which the entire wheel of family life revolves. Thus, the Sant Nirankari Mandal feels it necessary to convey the message to all that if you make this pivotal figure, the woman, unstable, the world may get destabilized. Hence, it deeply respects the existence of the woman at the root of this entire world.
