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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”**

Statement submitted by Greek Orthodox Archdiocesan Council of North and South America and Salesian Missions, 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.



Statement

As international faith-based organizations of the Christian tradition and as members of the human community, we regard the empowerment of women and gender equality as central components of the post-2015 development agenda. We acknowledge the progress made by Member States and civil society organizations since the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. The Millennium Development Goals advanced the empowerment of women. The proposed sustainable development goals of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals expand on the issue of women's empowerment and gender equality. We support the continued strengthening of the efforts made by the global community to ensure, through decisive goals, targets, and indicators, the rights of women and girls, but much work still needs to be done. The full participation of women at every level in setting the next development agenda is essential.

We believe that the global community must address the issues that impede development for all, especially for women and girls. Those issues include equal access to education, infant mortality, maternal health and access to clean water and sanitation. The feminization of extreme poverty and the unequal participation of women in both the private and public arenas also impede development for all. The Special Rapporteur on violence against women identifies the continued prevalence of violence against women and girls as the greatest threat to overcoming those obstacles and notes that such violence impairs and nullifies the realization of all human rights.

We reaffirm our shared interest in the empowerment of women and girls worldwide and the right of all people to peace, security and freedom. All people are entitled to live with dignity regardless of gender or sex. We insist that the pursuit of equality and the recognition of that universal dignity must continue solely by peaceful means, while remembering and respecting the unique contributions of both women and men within their cultures, customs and traditions.

Assessing the problem of violence against women

Both physical and psychological violence against women take many forms, including domestic violence, violence in armed conflict, rape and sexual assault, violence during migration, trafficking in women and girls, and conditions of extreme poverty. All forms of violence result in the silencing of women, denying them the rights of expression and full participation in the lives of their families and in their communities and governments. Violence of any form must be systematically addressed at all levels of society.

The physical, emotional, physiological, spiritual and social consequences inflicted upon victims of violence cannot be fully communicated or understood through the data that is collected. However, the study of violence against women does provide evidence that women and girls are disproportionately subjected to many forms of brutality, some of which are culturally based. The statistics related to violence against women and girls have been cited in the following sources:

(a) According to the World Health Organization (WHO), 35 per cent of women worldwide have experienced physical and/or sexual violence. In some national studies, 70 per cent of women have experienced intimate partner violence;

(b) The WHO global review of scientific data concluded that violence against women is a “global public health problem of epidemic proportions, requiring urgent action”;

(c) The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in the United States of America has shown that nearly 1 in 5 women has reported experiencing rape in their lifetime. Over 42 per cent of victims were first raped before age 18;

(d) The United Nations Children’s Fund reports that about 120 million girls worldwide have experienced forced intercourse or other forced sexual acts at some point in their lives;

(e) Data from the International Labour Organization shows that women and girls comprise 55 per cent of the estimated 20.9 million victims of forced labour worldwide and 98 per cent of the estimated 4.8 million victims of sexual exploitation;

(f) According to the United States Department of State, between 600,000 and 800,000 people are trafficked across international borders each year. More than 70 per cent of trafficked persons are female and many are victims of physical or sexual assault;

(g) The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime indicates that a disproportionate number of women are involved in human trafficking, as both victims and perpetrators. Female offenders play a prominent role in human trafficking, particularly in cases where former victims become perpetrators as a means of escape from their own victimization;

(h) The United Nations Action against Sexual Violence in Conflict has noted that the vast majority of casualties in modern conflicts and wars are civilian women and children. Systematic sexual violence against women and girls is regularly used as a weapon of war and as a means to achieve political and/or military objectives.

A transformative development agenda will only be realized when violence against women and girls is eradicated. Women and girls cannot live their lives freely when they are affected by a traumatic experience or the fear of imminent violence. The systemic use of violence inhibits victims from accomplishing daily tasks. It is our shared responsibility as a human community to protect women and girls and cherish their indispensable contributions made in and outside of the home.

In the spirit of love and humility, we condemn any and all forms of violence against women, including the silencing of women, the denial of full participation in society, workplace discrimination, sexual harassment and assault, rape and murder. Research shows that women and girls are disproportionately the victims of such violence. It is our responsibility to help create a universal culture that denounces all forms of violence against women and girls and protects them from such cruelties. Such a culture preserves our humanity and universal human dignity.

Recommendations

We believe that commitments to eliminating gender inequality and promoting women’s empowerment must be a part of a strong post-2015 development agenda. Recognizing our common but differentiated responsibilities, we recommend that Member States and civil society partner:

- To eliminate all forms of violence and abuse against all women and girls in the public and private sectors, including human trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation and/or forced labour, in particular in military and political conflicts
- To eliminate the increasing feminization of extreme poverty by achieving full and productive employment, including providing equal pay for equal work, and decent, gender equitable work for all women
- To ensure the provision of public services and adopt fiscal, wage and social protection policies to progressively achieve greater gender equity
- To ensure women's full, inclusive and effective participation by providing equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life
- To make legislative reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, inheritance and natural resources and access to financial services
- To avoid soft law mechanisms in favour of the adoption of legally binding instruments
- To enforce previously adopted legislative policies protecting women and girls from all forms of violence
- To adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels
