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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”**

Statement submitted by Salesian Missions, 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.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Salesian Missions, representing the Salesians of Don Bosco, is a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council. The Salesians serve the young, especially the marginalized and those living in poverty, in over 130 countries.

A commitment to women's empowerment and the elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls' is essential in the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, creating the World We Want, and ensuring that the human rights of all are promoted, protected and guaranteed.

The pillars of sustainable development have been identified as the environment, the economy and people. If one pillar is weak then the system as a whole is unsustainable. The challenge before us is to think of the world as a collection of interconnected systems that depend upon the simultaneous support and reinforcement of these pillars. Unfortunately, most national and international efforts to address problems in a given society focus on only one pillar at a time. The 60th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women challenges us to think and work more systemically if we want to achieve equity and sustainable development.

It has become clear that environmental sustainability must have the highest priority if we are to strengthen the pillars of sustainable development. The lower the capacity of the environment to support a society, then the lower ability of the social system to provide for the common good and the less output the economic system can produce. In *Laudato Si* (2015) Pope Francis challenged all people of good will to work for an integral ecology that protected our common home and all of its inhabitants by carefully working to construct sustainable economies that protect people and the planet.

Degradation of the environment is directly proportional with the exploitation of those living in poverty. Pursuing a sustainable and equitable future requires that we examine concentrations of economic, state, and transnational corporate power, and how this impacts the welfare of less powerful individuals and communities, especially women and girls. In light of this, we would like to raise for consideration the influence of extractive industries on the three pillars of sustainability and their impact on women and girls.

High levels of poverty and unemployment, as well as the diminishing of livelihoods and development alternatives due to a dominant model of extractivism has placed tremendous economic stress on working-class and peasant families in many countries. This has particular gendered effects on women, who often shoulder the responsibility of providing for the needs of their families. Women in mining communities often find themselves given lower wages for their work, they need to participate in the informal economy to compensate for additional funds or they find themselves being prostituted. Giving poor women real economic choices, ensuring economic justice for women, is critical if the cycle of poverty is to be ended.

Research has shown that women and girls are vulnerable to becoming victims of trafficking to mining sites. Forced labour, of both men and women, in extractive industries has been well-documented. And now governments and advocates have increasingly been studying the link between extractive industries and sex

trafficking. Recent reports have suggested that labour-brokering practices may have also fostered human trafficking to extractive sites.

Women and girls are especially vulnerable to violence in these communities since mining, drilling, and quarrying activities often occur in relatively remote areas. There is often minimal infrastructure and limited rule of law and so abusive behaviour often goes unchecked. These makeshift communities have been shown to be vulnerable to crime and the sexual exploitation of women and girls.

Non-governmental organizations have begun reporting on the commercial sexual exploitation of children related to mining sectors in Madagascar. In some areas, this exploitation is controlled by organized crime, but in other instances, desperate families have sold their children, often unwittingly, into virtual slavery in the belief that they were providing a better future for their children. The sexual exploitation of children and adolescents has also grown with the expansion of extractive industries (timber, oil, minerals and gas) in the Peruvian Amazon, and women and girls have been found to be victims of sex trafficking near gold mines in Suriname and Guyana.

With an increased interest in resource extraction in certain areas in the Arctic where climate change has made the areas more accessible, a growing number of people are now migrating to these remote regions of the North. This has increased the risk that indigenous women may be trafficked. Among indigenous people around the world, human trafficking is taking a tremendous toll as disproportionately large numbers of indigenous people, particularly women, are found to be modern trafficking victims.

Violence against women in conflict situations has been well documented (see World Health Organization; Amnesty International). It has also been shown that there is an association between the presence of extractives industries and conflict, especially where high-value resources are extracted. Conflict can arise when communities are dispossessed of their lands and natural resources, and as mining or climate change degrades an area, increased competition over shrinking renewable resources, such as land and water, intensifies the possibility of conflict. Women are particularly vulnerable in these situations. According to the World Health Organization women and girls in conflict situations are typically subjected to “mass rape ... sexual slavery, forced prostitution, and forced ‘marriages’; multiple rapes and gang rape (with multiple perpetrators) and the rape of young girls; sexual assault associated with violent physical assault; resurgence of female genital mutilation, within the community under attack, as a way to reinforce cultural identity; women forced to offer sex for survival, or in exchange for food, shelter, or ‘protection’.”

While demand for natural resources has increased, this cannot come at the expense of women and girls. The extractive industries have an obligation to protect both the environment and people as they do their business to make a profit and provide people with the products they produce. Exploitation of non-renewable resources and of people, women and girls, men and boys must be eliminated. It is not really possible to mine non-renewable resources sustainably since they are not in infinite supply. Additionally industries that support mineral extraction have sustainability issues of their own, e.g., mining consumes inordinate amounts of water and electricity. This is a major issue in resource-poor countries, one we must address.

Development available only to some is not development. Rather, it is a kind of exploitation, both of the earth's resources and of those left out of the development loop. Too often, those left out of the loop are women and girls. Now is the time to include everyone.

Recommendations

Looking to support the three pillars of sustainable development, we recommend that Member States:

- Regularly measure and transparently report communal and organizational usage of energy and other renewable and non-renewable resources.
- Collect data on the negative impacts of local extractive work on the health of women and children and provide needed health care services to address these health issues.
- Enact legal and policy interventions to help reduce human trafficking toward mining sites, whether for labour or sexual exploitation.
- Collect data to overcome the gap in knowledge about female migrants attracted to settlements surrounding extractive industry sites.
- Ensure that equal pay for equal work is given to men and women.
- Address demand for the sexual exploitation of women and girls and criminalize persons who promote, procure or purchase sex near extractive industry sites and in society.
- Implement nationally designed social protection floors according to ILO Recommendation 202 to help ensure a minimum standard of living for all.
