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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 Coalition against Trafficking in Women, 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

The Coalition against Trafficking in Women, a non-governmental organization working toward the elimination of sexual exploitation of women and girls and the realization of gender equality, affirms the need to examine the priority theme of women's empowerment and its link to sustainable development. It is fitting that the review theme of the sixtieth session of the Commission on the Status of Women is the elimination and prevention of violence against women and girls as it is necessary to examine global policies purported to empower women that actually have the consequence of promoting violence against women and girls.

The Coalition against Trafficking in Women is seriously concerned about the legitimization and normalization of the sex trade in the guise of women's economic empowerment. Prostitution, like many forms of sexual violence, arises from the historical subordination of women to men. The sex trade is built upon and maintains women's low social status and relegates women to the role of sexual merchandise. The more sexualisation and objectification of women and girls in society becomes accepted and pervasive, the less women and girls will be treated as equal human beings. Far from providing women with empowering employment opportunities, the proliferation of commercial sexual exploitation has the opposite effect: it perpetuates gender inequality, harming both those who are victimized within the sex trade and those who face sexual harassment, gender discrimination, and other forms of sexual violence as a result of the acceptability of viewing women as sexual objects to be bought and sold.

The sex trade thrives on the inequality of women and girls, and legalizing the demand for prostitution would further target vulnerable girls and young women. Legalizing and decriminalizing the sex trade and referring to prostituted women and children as "sex workers" leaves men's right to sexually exploit them unchallenged. It is a mistake to assume that men who buy the bodies of women and girls will identify and report instances of abuse and exploitation. Research into the behaviour and attitudes of men who buy sex shows that their attitudes range from callous denials of the humanity of women and girls in prostitution to exhibiting a propensity for perpetrating acts of violence against them. Moreover, the legal legitimization of prostitution gives men moral and social permission to purchase, use and abuse women and girls, which in turn increases the demand that fuels sex trafficking. Far from being encouraged and increased, the demand side of prostitution and trafficking must be addressed and curtailed through the criminalization and prosecution of traffickers, pimps, and buyers.

Further, exploitation in the sex trade is a significant barrier to achieving gender equality. Trafficking and exploitation is rampant within the sex trade and efforts to sanitize it with innocuous labels such as "sex work," are a dangerously misguided strategy. International law is very clear that violence against women, including trafficking and the exploitation of prostitution, is a violation of human rights. Promoting commercial sexual exploitation as "sex work" and legalizing and decriminalizing the sex trade as a legitimate trade is in gross violation of long established human rights principles and international conventions, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

Governments must not use short-term economic measures, such as permitting and encouraging the proliferation of the sex trade, to address development and the

feminization of poverty. Legitimization and normalization of the sex trade has a profoundly negative long-term impact on the human rights and dignity of all women and girls. Rather, governments must adopt and adequately fund programs aimed at ensuring equal access to education for women and girls and ending employment discrimination based upon gender. In promoting access to technologies such as the Internet, governments should take steps to combat the negative impact of the media's promotion of violence against women. Adopting short-sighted economic and educational policies that are not protective of dignity and human rights prevents societies from achieving the goal of gender equality and the empowerment of women.

Recommendations

- We call on States to honour their commitment to the empowerment of women by rejecting the expansion of the commercial sexual exploitation under the guise that it provides economic opportunities for women and girls. Action must be taken in the following areas:
- Criminalizing the perpetrators of all crimes of sexual exploitation, including buyers and procurers of prostituted and trafficked women and girls.
- 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.
- Strengthening laws and policies to assist victims of gender-based violence.
- Creating economic empowerment programs for women at risk of being trafficked and sexually exploited and raising awareness about the danger of trafficking.
- Adopting immigration remedies for victims of sexual violence and exploitation, including asylum and lawful residency.
- Supporting educational programs addressing the 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.
- Increasing holistic medical assistance for victims of sexual exploitation and other violence, including appropriate mental health services addressing their extensive trauma, depression, anxiety and drug dependency.
- Rejecting the legalization, decriminalization or normalization of sexual violence and the lack of prosecution or enforcement of laws that hold perpetrators accountable.
- Rejection of the misleading term “sex work,” which minimizes the abuses and exploitation of prostitution and attempts to redefine it as an ordinary job, particularly for impoverished and marginalized women.
- Recognizing the role of the media and Internet in promoting sexual violence and adopting measures to combat the growing sexualisation of women and girls and abuse of women and girls in the production and consumption of pornography.

Women have the unequivocal right to equality, including the right to make decisions about their health, body and sexuality. Men, on the other hand, do not have the fundamental right to gain access to that body in the sex trade or any other public or private sphere. Sexual exploitation is not inevitable. If we are truly committed to women's human rights, we can achieve a world without sexual exploitation — a world in which all girls and women own their bodies and their lives.
