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## Commission on the Status of Women

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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 Casa Generalizia della Societa' del Sacro Cuore, Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary - Loreto Generalate, Maryknoll Sisters of St. Dominic, Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary, Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, and VIVAT International, 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.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

The Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, together with the organizations listed welcome the sixty-fourth session of the Commission on the Status of Women and the opportunity to review and appraise the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, 25 years after its adoption. The world of 2020 is very different to that of 1995. Despite continued progress and development and multiple resolutions and commitments entered into by Member States and governments alike we, Sisters of the Good Shepherd and Mission Partners, together with the women and girls we accompany, have not experienced the fruits of these promises. Women and girls continue to experience multidimensional poverty; experience hunger and malnutrition; do not have access to quality medical care and education, are discriminated against because of race, caste, and ethnic origin; continually experience gender-based violence and harmful practices; are denied access to financial services; have their human rights denied and violated; are exploited in the economy; bear the burden of unpaid care work; and often engage in the exploitative labour markets to eke out a living for themselves and their families. These experiences do not facilitate opportunities for engaging in decision-making or fully participating in economics, science, or politics. Women's and girls' rights and opportunities are further eroded with situations of continual conflict, the climate crisis, and the negative impacts of technological transformation. Institutional mechanisms for women's advancement do not reach these women and girls who can be further threatened given the economic, social, environmental, or political situation in any given country.

We are living in a complex era of history dominated by neoliberal capitalism, favouring financialized globalization, which generates economic growth that is intrinsically unequal, new trends in technology that impact economies and societies, both positively and negatively, the rise of populist authoritarianism, and the climate crisis, all interconnecting to threaten women's and girls' quest for gender equality and the full acknowledgement of their human rights. When family and community systems break down, or human-made and natural disasters occur, vulnerabilities already experienced are further exacerbated, resulting in displacement, either within one's own country or across international borders. These dominant trends reduce social and public policy space, as well as spending, in favour of austerity measures, thus denying women and girls access to basic services and social protection.

We are especially concerned about the exploitation of women and girls in human trafficking, prostitution, commercial sexual exploitation, and the formal and informal labour markets. Families, girls, children and young women experiencing multidimensional poverty are particularly vulnerable to being trafficked and exploited. Commercial sexual exploitation and the sex trade are profit-making industries, structurally embedded within the neoliberal capitalist system. The exponential growth of technology has facilitated the expansion of the pornographic industry, which influences sex buyers to engage in commercial sexual exploitation and grooms girls, making them vulnerable to exploitation and trafficking into prostitution. Political structures and systems that devalue and exclude women and girls, and do not evaluate gender outcomes of sociopolicy, give prostitution acceptance. The root causes of prostitution are tied to poverty, patriarchy, male privilege, extreme wealth, racist attitudes, militarization, ecological degradation, inadequate family support, and the demand by men for women to be available for sexual purchase. The rapid global expansion of human trafficking as a criminal industry has increased the demand for women and girls to be objects of prostitution.

We recognize that the multiple harms of prostitution make it an egregious form of discrimination. Our position on prostitution is rooted in the dignity of the human

person. It echoes the United Nations 1949 Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others that says: “Prostitution is incompatible with the dignity and worth of the human person and endangers the welfare of the individual, the family and the community.” Prostitution by its nature is exploitative and can never be part of the decent work agenda. The idea that women are commodities available to be consumed and exploited has no place in a society striving for gender equality. Contrary to the view that prostitution is a profession and can be dignified by organizing it as an acceptable form of work is in itself an assault on the person. We hold that all prostitution is a form of gender-based violence perpetrated on girls and women by systems of patriarchy, misogyny and male privilege, all endemic within neoliberal capitalism. The push from within many circles towards full decriminalization of the sex industry is a fatal blow to girls’ rights, women’s rights, and gender equality. Advocacy for the full decriminalization of the sex industry is the corporate, patriarchal, criminal, and neoliberal capitalist capture of the gender equality agenda. The review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in the Commission on the Status of Women and onwards into the Generation Equality Forum in Mexico and Paris will never be achieved as long as women, feminists, and girls fail to confront this reality.

The prevention and protection of women and girls from the system of prostitution was central to the 12 critical areas of concern of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. The effective suppression of trafficking in women and girls for the sex trade was a matter of pressing international concern. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action called on governments to address the root factors that enable trafficking in women and girls for prostitution and other forms of commercialized sex and to assist victims of violence due to prostitution and trafficking. Platform I on the human rights of women is equally insistent on strengthening the implementation of all relevant human rights instruments in order to combat and eliminate organized and other forms of trafficking in women and children, including trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation, pornography, prostitution, and sex tourism.

In the intervening 25 years, much has been achieved on paper: the Convention on Transnational Organized Crime and its Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Women and Children (2000); the Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons (2010); and the adoption of the Nordic/Equality Model by some governments; with the continual efforts of the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime. However, the impacts of global legislation do not seem to decrease the number of trafficked persons or increase justice, reparations, accountability or prosecutions.

Twenty-five years after the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, it is time for action – action that makes a real difference in women’s and girls’ lives and that is translated into services at the local level, addressing the root causes of gender inequality and the daily violations of women’s and girls’ human rights. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is the strategic plan for humanity. Full implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 5: Gender Equality will have cross-cutting impacts across the Agenda. Our organizations continue to counter the forces that seek to decriminalize the sex trade in the name of gender equality. It is not authentic to advocate for the elimination of all trafficking for sexual exploitation in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Sustainable Development Goals 5.2, 8.7, and 16.2, and at the same time condone the decriminalization of the sex industry and legitimize it as “sex work” and women’s “choice”.

It is time for States as duty bearers of human rights to step up and provide more than legal mechanisms for prosecution. It is time for the allocation of more resources for the prevention of human trafficking and protection of the basics for decent living

and human dignity for all people. Resources exist but sharing of resources is amiss. Member States must resolve the conflict of interest between the world of neoliberal capitalism and the corporate capture by the commercial sex industry and the human rights of every girl and woman.

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