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political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement* submitted by Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[21 August 2019]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.



Addressing tomorrow's Slavery today: efforts in Fiji

Overview: What are anti-slavery efforts in the future?

This statement focuses on the pointed, contextual efforts undertaken in Fiji to address the issue of modern slavery in the form of sex trafficking and sexual exploitation. Homes of Hope, the organisation associated with this statement, is involved not only in tackling the structural impediments that come in the way of addressing the issue, but also is the only organisation of its kind in the South Pacific to provide long-term residential care and training for girls who are vulnerable or victims of forced sex and domestic sex trafficking. For the past 22 years, Homes of Hope has rehabilitated over 1,000 young girls, women, and children on their residential campus, and provided support and awareness for thousands of other girls and families from outlying communities and schools. This statement is informed by the lives of these survivors, research undertaken by Homes of Hope and other sources, coupled with statistics from the Fijian government, to address tomorrow's sex slavery today.

Addressing the culture of silence

One of the most difficult hurdles faced when addressing issues surrounding forced sex and domestic sex trafficking is the culture of silence. In a 2019 report released by ECPAT: A deeply rooted "tradition of shame and silence" shapes this culture of violence. In the context of sexual abuse and exploitation, cultural taboos surrounding sex make the stigma against victims of violence even more detrimental. Historically, reporting incidents of sexual violence has resulted in shame for the victim and their family, making them an even more vulnerable target for further violence.¹

According to the UN Secretary General's report on the study of violence against children, he states that "much violence against children remains hidden for many reasons. One is fear: many children are afraid to report incidents of violence against them. In many cases, parents, who should protect their children, remain silent if the violence is perpetrated by a spouse or other family member, a more powerful member of society such as an employer, a police officer, or a community leader. Fear is closely related to the stigma frequently attached to reporting violence, particularly in places where family "honour" is placed above the safety and well-being of children."² This phenomenon is also prevalent throughout Fiji.

There is a strong culture of silence in the South Pacific or "taboo" regarding speaking about sex and sexual abuse. Children and youth are taught that it is disrespectful to voice their opinions or share their thoughts. With Fiji's society being patriarchal in nature, this often leaves women and young people with little room to voice their opinions.³ The culture of silence keeps forced sex hidden and continues the cycle of abuse and exploitation. This needs to be boldly confronted at the grass roots level as the majority of domestic trafficking cases take place within the family unit itself. According to the recent findings of the ECPAT on Fiji: These findings reaffirm that children are most often sexually exploited by people who they know either in their family or who may otherwise be within their circle of trust.⁴ One participant explained that "perpetrators of those Sexually Exploited Children

¹ ECPAT International, *Fiji – Country Overview: A report on the scale, scope and context of the sexual exploitation of children*, June 2019. Available at: <https://www.ecpat.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/ECPAT-Country-Overview-Report-Fiji-2019.pdf>.

² UN General Assembly, *Report of the independent expert for the United Nations study on violence against children*, 29 August 2006. Available at: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N06/491/05/PDF/N0649105.pdf?OpenElement>.

³ Vanisha Mishra-Vakaoti, *The Social Face of Deprivation in Exploring Multidimensional Poverty in Fiji: Findings from a study using the individual Deprivation Measure*, July 2017. Available at: <https://iwda.org.au/assets/files/IDM-Fiji-Final-Study-Report-31072017.pdf>.

⁴ ECPAT International, *Perceptions of frontline welfare workers on the sexual exploitation of children in the Pacific*, June 2019. Available at: <https://www.ecpat.org/wp->

(SEC) cases were those of whom those children have trusted most. They were breadwinners of the whole family as well as tuition fees providers...one of them was a father, and the other two were uncles.” Several participants observed that in their country context, the facts that children are most often victimized by their families and that many people in communities know each other both increases children’s vulnerability to sexual exploitation and makes it incredibly difficult for children to report what happened to them due to fear of repercussions and judgement⁵ making it easier for them to communicate and exploit children.

Addressing victim trauma through restorative care

For victims of sex trafficking, complex trauma occurs repeatedly and cumulatively, usually over a period and often includes catastrophic trauma and ensnaring cycles that can be devastating. There are dramatic effects on the body including the individual’s ability to self-regulate, both psychologically and physically. This also interferes with perception, cognition, affective tolerance, basic bodily functions such as digestion and respiration, among others. Additionally, the emotional effects of trafficking trauma may include anxiety, panic disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, major depression, self-harm, and/or substance abuse.⁶

Restoring the life of a victim can take a lifetime to work through all the layers of grief and trauma. This can only happen when resources are available, key stakeholders are trauma informed, and a collaborative approach is taken. If the restoration process is not adequate, then the cycle of exploitation will continue. The UN Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, Maria Grazia Giammarinaro, spoke about the extensive need of the restoration process at the World Day Against Trafficking:⁷

Survivors of trafficking need solidarity and a friendly social environment to regain control of their lives. The right to an effective remedy is at the core of a victim-centred and human rights-based approach that empowers victims of trafficking and respects fully their human rights.” However, to date, compensation remains one of the least implemented provisions of the Palermo Protocol, especially with regard to trafficked children. Access to remedies is not limited to compensation, but it also encompasses restitution, which implies the reuniting of families and the restoration of employment for victims, as well as guarantees of non-repetition. This includes a strong preventive component, requiring States to address the root causes of trafficking.”

A component of compensation is an “empowerment process for survivors of trafficking requiring a transformative process based on education and training, opening new paths to help them acquire new skills and equipping them for job opportunities. In particular for women, such a process should not be shaped on traditional gender-based activities but should rather explore innovative solutions in non-traditional areas of education and employment.”⁸ A component of restitution is to stop cycles of forced sex and domestic sex trafficking, at a minimum, each victim and each individual who is vulnerable to becoming a victim, needs: safe housing; medical and legal support; counselling; trauma-informed therapy; life and job skills training; basic literacy and numeracy.

content/uploads/2019/06/Perceptions-of-Frontline-Welfare-Workers-on-the-Sexual-Exploitation-of-Children-in-the-Pacific-ECPAT-research-June-2019.pdf.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Evelyn P Boyer, *The Role of Trauma in Human Trafficking*, 2014. Available at: <https://humantraffickingsearch.org/the-role-of-trauma-in-human-trafficking/>.

⁷ UN Human Rights Council, *World Day Against Trafficking in Persons: "Profound change" needed for social inclusion of survivors of trafficking, says UN rights expert*, 30 July 2019. Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=24856&LangID=E>.

⁸ Ibid.

Addressing victim re-traumatisation through community safety nets

An ILO survey on child labour in Fiji stated that children found living in the urban and peri-urban areas were in the worst forms of child labour, in hazardous work, sexual exploitation including in sex trafficking and in illicit activities. Furthermore, explaining that the exploitation of children is largely driven by poverty, the lack of educational and employment opportunities, family breakdown, the lack of appropriate services and poor law enforcement.⁹

Each community, informal settlement and village, needs to have gate keepers (identified and appointed leaders in a village/community) to know and understand the issues surrounding forced sex and domestic sex trafficking, the signs/indicators of a victim, and the push and pull factors that contribute towards incidents. These individuals need to be trained to have a basic understanding of international and national language, laws and policies surrounding trafficking, as well as appropriate reporting procedures.

Secondly, a safety net needs to be built and gate keepers and individuals need to be trained as to who would be the appropriate people or stakeholders to refer specific cases to, i.e.: a rape case should be referred to the “*nasi ni koro*” (village nurse) as well as the community police; incest cases should be reported to the “*turaga ni koro*” (village headman), so that he can then report to the appropriate mandated authority.

Lastly, every village and informal settlement needs a referral mechanism built into their community action plan, so that there is never a question of who to refer a case to, what the contact number is, or the appropriate referral procedure. These three steps need the concerted effort of relevant CSOs and government bodies to work together in a strategic and unified manner.

Conclusion

Through collaboration with government and non-government sectors and extensive face-to-face interactions with exploited girls, it is recommended that three dynamics must be combined to forestall this evasive negative force in our communities: breaking the culture of silence, building safety nets in our strongly-linked communities, and restorative trauma informed care for victims:

- First, significant results to break the “taboo” culture of silence will occur with these determined efforts: up-to-date research statistics, networked efforts by CSO stakeholders, and sensitizing, empowering efforts towards the constitutional government and traditional government leaders.
- Secondly, the greatest impact to curb or stop sexual violence, exploitation, and trafficking can come from the safety nets built in the communities themselves. Not only does the culture of silence need to be broken, but replaced with approved action plans, and training for community workers, traditional and faith-based leaders, and youth. These groups must be made aware, given resources to protect girls and boys, and taught avenues to find help.
- Thirdly, victims and their supportive community must be given tools of trauma-informed care to bring restoration for the individual to be champions to show the way past shame and the culture of silence.

Homes of Hope, Fiji NGO(s) without consultative status, also shares the views expressed in this statement.

⁹ International Labour Organisation, *Child Labour in Fiji: A survey of working children in commercial sexual exploitation, on the streets, in rural agricultural communities, in informal and squatter settlements and in schools*, 2010. Available at: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/---ilo-suva/documents/publication/wcms_155659.pdf.