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Statement submitted by 3Strands Global Foundation, 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

3Strands Global Foundation respectfully submits this statement in response to the opportunity to address the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women in March of 2021.

As a nation, recent current events have caused many of us to look inwards to develop a better sense of “what matters most” in the USA in 2020. Infused in conversations about justice, civil rights, racism, and equality, there remain lingering concerns held over from the #MeToo Movement that began in 2017 regarding the role of women and girls in our modern society. What fuels ongoing conversations is the reality that violence against women remains pervasive and sincere conversations about bettering the USA and all nations around the world must include efforts to eradicate sexual violence, including the global sex trade. Sexual violence is a significant concern and human trafficking is one of the worst forms of violence against women and girls. Quite often, victims of sex trafficking are subjected to extreme physical and mental abuse through rape, forced abortion and physical brutality. These victims lose their ties to their former lives as well as their voices.

Traffickers, by means of violence designed to intimidate and subdue their victims, deny them the right to exercise their voices and free will during the time of their victimization and beyond. Female victims of trafficking are robbed of their ability to participate in normal daily life and, too often, robbed of their ability to make decisions in the future. If the #MeToo Movement has helped us to better understand the restraints that prevent contemporary women from enthusiastically participating in public life, one can only imagine how the experiences of sex trafficking survivors impact their decision-making and diminish their belief that they, too, can one day play an active role in public life.

The vast majority of victims impacted by sex trafficking are female. In the United States of America alone, the 2019 Federal Human Trafficking Report states that 95.1 per cent of victims in human trafficking cases active in 2019 were women. Additionally, in active sex trafficking cases alone, 97.9 per cent of victims were women (19). Globally, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime Global Report on Trafficking in Persons, reports 79 per cent of human trafficking is sexual exploitation, primarily affecting women (6). Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network, the nation’s largest anti-sexual violence organization, reports that one of every six American women has been the victim of an attempted or completed rape in her lifetime. This level of violence toward women should concern us all because women around the world are the linchpins keeping families, communities and nations moving forward in progressive ways. Too often, a woman’s voice is shuttered due to her exposure to violence in and out of a trafficking situation. We must eliminate violence and specifically violence against women so that our society can benefit from their full participation.

The World Health Organization reports that women are more likely to experience violence inflicted by an intimate partner if they were abused as a child, witnessed a mother’s abuse as a child, were only able to obtain a low level of education, or forced to accept societal depictions of male privilege and female subordination. Knowing this, the empowerment of women and their connection to proper resources is of the utmost importance. For years, survivors have told 3Strands Global Foundation that one of the most important things we can do is to help them get a job. Employment opportunities, as well as education, allow survivors and those at-risk of being exploited to transition to self-sufficiency. Obtaining a job or entering into an education program are the first steps in pursuing a future of one’s own choosing, and empower an individual to pursue a new life, free from exploitation.

It is important to note that anyone, anywhere can be a victim of human trafficking. There are, however, certain vulnerabilities that increase a person's likelihood of exploitation. These include, but are not limited to, financial instability, lack of access to banking and capital resources (particularly in third world nations), lack of safe shelter, lack of food and water, and the missing feelings of love and acceptance. As we consider these and other vulnerabilities, it's important to also examine how we can call upon the voices of women to help address vulnerabilities early in a person's life. In 2019, 76 per cent of public-school teachers were female. Our female teachers can help our students understand vulnerability and prevention strategies to thwart traffickers.

We know that prevention, including education and employment, can make a meaningful and tangible impact in helping women and girls avoid exploitation and re-exploitation. 3Strands Global Foundation believes that prevention through education matters. Our PRevention Organized to Educate Children on Trafficking (PROTECT) program was co-founded in California by three nonprofit organizations; 3Strands Global Foundation, Frederick Douglass Family Initiatives, and Love Never Fails, to educate students, teachers, school officials, parents, caregivers, and other community members on the dangers of exploitation and the tactics of traffickers. Teachers are trained and provided with vetted curricula at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. This includes lesson plan components such as presentations, videos, activities, and discussions. Throughout lessons, students participate in activities that increase their knowledge and measure behavior change in their lives. Engaging topics include value and worth, healthy relationships, what it means to be a conscious consumer, empowerment to advocate for their own freedom, and others.

This training begins to establish a level of understanding about human trafficking, trauma-informed approaches, and what to do if a victim is identified. This curriculum impacts both girls and boys in the classroom, equipping them with the tools and knowledge necessary to protect themselves from exploitation, and encouraging all to treat peers with respect. 3Strands Global Foundation's outcomes point to the program's capacity to reshape the previously accepted societal and cultural norms regarding the importance of women, their equality in society, and the necessity for men to respect and honor women in all aspects of life.

Program outcomes include increased adult knowledge of human trafficking, increased student awareness of signs, tactics, and forms of human trafficking, behavioral changes in students, and a reduction of incident rates. To date, an estimated half a million students have been educated on human trafficking through PROTECT Prevention Education and over 40,000 educational staff members have been trained. The program continues to expand both nationally and internationally.

Educational advocacy is also of high significance in propelling efforts to combat human trafficking and the exploitation of women. Our co-sponsored bill, AB 1227, The Human Trafficking Prevention Education and Training Act, was signed into law on October 7th, 2017. This law requires Prevention Education to be taught in California Schools and makes California a national and global leader in the fight against human trafficking.

The World Health Organization also reports that empowerment counseling and advocacy are beneficial factors in the reduction of violence against women. Through our Employ + Empower program, survivors and women at-risk of being exploited are each connected with a Case Manager or Social Worker who walks the journey of empowerment with them, assessing their physical and emotional needs and offering counsel. Throughout the job or education search and application process, Case Managers and Social Workers operate through a direct service approach, providing survivors and women at-risk with hygiene products, professional clothing,

transportation, child-care assistance, job and interview preparation, assistance obtaining identification documentation, and more. This includes advocacy and support throughout each woman's journey to sustainability.

To date, the program has connected 337 survivors and individuals at-risk of being exploited with employment and education opportunities, resources needed to succeed, and other direct services. Of these 337, 73 per cent identified as women.

We believe that prevention is essential to the eradication of human trafficking, including the sexual exploitation of women. It holds the power to change everything. Prevention of crimes against women can change the societal depiction of women and girls and encourage men and boys to assist in rewriting the script that illustrates the importance, value, power, and status of women as equals in every way. Prevention can empower all.
