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Statement submitted by National Board of Catholic Women of England and Wales, 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 priority theme this year is of particular importance to CAP-International, (the International Coalition for the Abolition of Prostitution) its 33 frontline member organisations in 27 countries, and their allies. Between them, they provide direct support to more than 15 000 women and girls affected by prostitution and trafficking in human beings for sexual-exploitation on all continents. The National Board of Catholic Women of England and Wales are prioritising this often overlooked perspective by using their ECOSOC status to present their statement. women@thewell, a frontline service provider in the UK, as a member of both organisations, has worked with CAP-International to prepare and present this statement.

Sexual-exploitation of women and girls and the system of prostitution: at the crossroads of all forms of discriminations and oppressions.

The elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls is a prerequisite for achieving gender equality. This is especially true when it comes to sexual-violence and exploitation which disproportionately target and affect the most discriminated communities of women and girls.

Indigenous women and girls, women and girls belonging to racial, ethnic and religious minorities or to the lowest castes, displaced, migrant and refugee women are the most impacted by the system of prostitution and by trafficking in human beings for sexual-exploitation. In addition to this discrimination based on origins, in every situation of prostitution, common patterns of features can be observed: minority, poverty, homelessness, experience of past abuse and substance addictions take part in the vicious cycle of sexual-exploitation and prostitution. The Last Girls are thus at the intersection of all systems of oppression and domination whether patriarchy, racism, classism and capitalism. In the gendered and patriarchal system of prostitution, some major political trends are at work namely colonization, war, imperialism, exploitation of natural resources and land dispossession.

Taking a macro analysis of the sex-trade, Gail Dines, a social scientist and founder of Culture Reframed, argues that prostitution and pornography are seamlessly woven together, both economically and culturally. Stating that pornography is prostitution with the camera going, and both depend on the intersection of sexism, racism and poverty to provide a steady supply of women and children into the sex-trade. There is now an extensive body of research on the ways women and children are recruited into the sex-trade and the systematic forms of violence they endure at the hands of pimps and punters. She also argues that “Johns are not born, but created through a patriarchal socialisation system that trains them from an early age that they have the right and privilege to buy sex”. One of the major institutions of this socialization is pornography because it depicts, in explicit and unambiguous ways, that women are disposable sex objects lacking agency, and personhood. As porn becomes the major form of sex education in the western world, more and more boys are developing their sexual template by and through images of violence against women. As these boys grow into early adulthood, the messages of porn legitimize the buying of women and thus help drive the demand side.

The extremely harmful consequences of a crime driven by profit

The economic and sexual-exploitation of the most vulnerable women and children is not only a serious violation of human rights, it's also one of the most lucrative forms of organized crime in the world. The criminal market for trafficking in human beings generates \$150 billion annually. 66 per cent of these criminal profits come from the prostitution market.

Trafficking in human beings is thus a profit-driven crime. Countries, regions, cities and communities of destination therefore bear an important responsibility for the increase in this globalized phenomenon. 100 per cent of the profits made in trafficking for sexual-exploitation come from the male demand for paid sex alone. It's to meet this demand that millions of women and girls are trafficked domestically and internationally.

The consequences of sexual and prostitutional violence are now well identified and particularly serious: post-traumatic stress, depression, suicide, self-harm, severe sexual and reproductive health complications, overuse of drugs and medication, low self-esteem, loss of confidence, anxiety and phobias, etc. Mortality, suicide and exposure rates to rape and other inhuman and degrading acts by prostituted persons are incomparably higher than in the general population.

States obligations, under international human rights law, to eliminate the exploitation of prostitution of women and girls

States parties are bound by their obligations under international human rights law, which include a direct obligation to “suppress all forms of trafficking in women and the exploitation of prostitution of others”.

Article 6 of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, CEDAW, states: “States Parties shall take all appropriate measures, including legislation, to suppress all forms of traffic in women and exploitation of prostitution of women”. In its preamble, the UN Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others reminds that “prostitution and the accompanying evil of the traffic in persons for the purpose of prostitution are incompatible with the dignity and worth of the human person”. Under article 9 of the UN Palermo protocol States Parties have also an obligation to “adopt or strengthen legislative or other measures, such as educational, social or cultural measures, including through bilateral and multilateral cooperation, to discourage the demand that fosters all forms of exploitation of persons, especially women and children, that leads to trafficking”.

These binding obligations have been consolidated by global human-rights and sustainable developments policy frameworks. The Sustainable Development Goal 5.2 identifies as a key target to “Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation”. The Beijing Platform for Action, Strategic objective D.3 urges States to “Take appropriate measures to address the root factors, including external factors, that encourage trafficking in women and girls for prostitution and other forms of commercialised sex, forced marriages and forced labour in order to eliminate trafficking in women”.

The insufficient response from the international community to this date

Despite the seriousness of this phenomenon and the existence of international treaties aimed at ending it for several decades, the international community has so far failed to halt the development of trafficking in human beings for sexual-exploitation and the exploitation of the prostitution of women and children, or to provide assistance and protection to their victims. Indeed, the criminal market for sexual-exploitation remains one of the most lucrative in the world. In addition, the number of victims has continued to increase over the past 30 years, while the number of protected victims and convicted offenders remains marginal. Less than 1 per cent of victims of trafficking in human beings for sexual-exploitation are identified and protected, and only 9,000 convictions are handed down against traffickers worldwide each year.

The abolitionist model: a pathway to hope led by several champion States

A limited but growing number of States and jurisdictions (Sweden, Norway, Iceland, Northern Ireland, Canada, Ireland, France and Israel) have demonstrated that it is possible to effectively combat trafficking in human beings and the exploitation of the prostitution of others, by adopting holistic and consistent public policies based on international human rights law.

These States have all recognised that the exploitation of the prostitution of others and trafficking in human beings for the purpose of sexual-exploitation impede the right to live in safety and dignity and constitute major obstacles to equality between women and men. Consequently, they have fully decriminalised victims of prostitution and trafficking, and criminalised pimping, procuring, trafficking and the purchase of sex.

In this context, the National Board of Catholic Women of England and Wales and its allies urge all States parties to adopt the following measures (and the UN system to support their universal adoption and implementation):

The repeal of all measures of repression, registration or specific controls against prostituted persons and victims of trafficking in human beings;

The implementation of protection measures, holistic support and exit support programs;

The effective criminalisation of trafficking in human beings and pimping in all its forms;

The prohibition of the purchase of sexual acts in order to deprive pimps and traffickers of their income;

The adoption of prevention programs, equality education and professional training policies.

Statement is endorsed by:

National Alliance of Women's Organisations

Widows Rights International
