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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 special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in the critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: (ii) Women's human rights and the elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls as defined in the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly

Statement submitted by the Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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As an international non-governmental organization whose members are in daily social service provision with women in 67 countries, the Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd would like to submit the following regarding human rights and violence against women:

Our organization affirms the fundamental right of equality and dignity for women, the right of women to be free of violence. This right places obligations on States to ensure the fulfilment of Rights.

Given the many forms of violence of concern to this Commission, our organization seeks to highlight the harm and violence done to women in systems of prostitution.

* E/CN.6/2003/1.

The condemnation of the prostitution of women is a contentious issue due the sovereignty of nations who have legalized prostitution. Likewise, those who profit from systems of the prostitution of women welcome silence on this issue. The international community has learned through processes of working towards the elimination of domestic violence, female genital mutilation, early marriage and other formerly legal, sanctioned and protected cultural or traditional practices, that no law, no culture, no tradition may deny the fulfilment of human rights. They apply and must be protected in all situations.

Prostitution is an issue of human rights of women. It is not a form of labour. It is a transformation of the human person into an economic commodity that exposes women and girls to assault, rape, HIV/AIDS, chronic health problems, kidnapping, torture, murder, and trafficking. Prostitution severely limits the human person. There is no regulation of prostitution that can ensure freedom from the abuse, violence and harm done to women.

NGOs that provide social services know that the external factors identified by the Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, in his report on trafficking in women and girls (A/55/322) that encourage human trafficking also apply as factors that condemn women to all forms of violence, including becoming victims of systems of prostitution. Those factors identified in paragraph 50 of the report are “poverty and discrimination and inequality which prevent women from exercising control over their lives.” The prostitution of women is an inevitable reality resultant from the structural inequality of women.

Members of our organization express the situation of women in prostitution this way:

A Sister who accompanies women on the streets in Belfast says that, in the last year, two women in her neighbourhood were murdered. Beatings of women are frequent; one woman is now paralysed, another unconscious. Stabbings and drug usage are a part of the scene ...

A Sister from India says that the gap between women and girls and general society is growing wider. Both local and global efforts are required to bridge the gap. Breakdown in relationships in family, lack of service provision in schools and health agencies, poor implementation of existing laws serve to alienate women and girls. Thus, their lives centre on survival, and they are vulnerable to further exploitation of trafficking or prostitution.

A Sister from Latin America pleads: “Our girls are violated without voice and without future. Who takes the responsibility for the trauma done to these girls? Who will call for justice?”

We call upon the Commission on the Status of Women at its forty-seventh session to continue the work of Beijing and of Beijing+5. Since the Beijing Platform for Action, Governments were 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 commercialized sex” (A/55/322, para. 18). We therefore emphasize the necessity of maintaining the principles of the 1949 Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others. We reaffirm the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, and the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in

Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. Additionally, we take exception to the International Labour Organization Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labour, 1999, specifically No. 182, that categorizes the trafficking of children for prostitution as a form of labour, albeit, a worst form. While Convention No. 182 is undoubtedly well intentioned, we believe it is important to state that the trafficking of children for prostitution is more appropriately referred to as a violation of human rights than as a labour violation. We seek to use the good work of the United Nations to change the stark and violent reality that so many women face on a daily basis. We seek to support the work of this Commission in upholding the rights of women to self-determination, to access to universal human rights, and to oppose any tolerance of those who traffic in women and girls, who prostitute women and girls or who sexually exploit women or girls in any manner.
