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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 critical areas of concern
and further actions and initiatives: enhanced participation of
women in development: an enabling environment for achieving
gender equality and the advancement of women, taking into
account, inter alia, the fields of education, health and work**

Statement submitted by Franciscans International, 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 of 25 July 1996.

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* E/CN.6/2006/1.

Statement

The Beijing Platform of Action recognizes that women face barriers to full equality and advancement, and that additional obstacles exist for, “immigrant women and migrant women, including women migrant workers.” Substantial progress has been made on improving the participation of women in development, yet migrant women face significant and specific challenges in development demonstrated by increased susceptibility to violence and lack of full integration into political, social and economic institutions.

Women account for 49% of the almost 200 million migrants worldwide and since 1970 overall female migration has reached near parity with male migration.¹ Migrant women play an increasingly important role in the development process and their ability to access education, health and employment often impacts their family in both the countries of origin and destination. While migration can be an empowering experience for women contributing positively to national and individual development, migrant women can also be at greater risk to experience discrimination, violence and a denial of their human rights. As the Report of the Global Commission on International Migration 2005 states, “Women who migrate for the purpose of marriage, domestic labour or to work in the entertainment and sex industries are particularly vulnerable to exploitation and social isolation, as are those who are trafficked.”

The situation of women migrants and gender-based approach to migration was also a central theme in all reports of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of Migrants since 2000. These reports document that migrant women are often more dependent on employers than men and are at greater risk for exploitation and abuse. They also recommend that countries develop policies that enhance migrant women’s employment opportunities, access to safe housing, education, language training, health care and other services in the host country.²

Franciscans International, representing over 800,000 Franciscan men and women in 180 countries around the world, works on behalf of the poor for peace, justice and care for creation; advocating for the realization of the full equality and dignity of all creation.

Throughout the world, Franciscans work to protect and empower migrants, specifically migrant women, enabling them to participate fully in the development process.

Franciscans International’s recent study, “What kind of protection for migrant workers in Lebanon?” highlighted the lack of Migrants’ rights in Lebanon, especially migrant domestic workers from India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, Ethiopia and Nigeria. Franciscan members advocate for migrant women in cases of sexual abuse, mistreatment, harassment, and even death. They give social and pastoral support to the migrant worker populations and are committed to raising community awareness through sensitization and education campaigns for students, authorities and government officials. However, reforms in national laws and public information are necessary to create an enabling environment for migrant women.

For example, Franciscans in Lebanon recently assisted a female migrant worker who was accused of stealing her employer’s credit card and was taken to the police station in Broumana. There she was brutally beaten and transferred to another detention center where police officers used belts to beat her until she lost consciousness. Afterwards, someone entered her cell room, beat her again and raped her several times as was confirmed by the doctor who later examined her.

In light of the status of migrant women and the nexus between achieving gender equality, development and the situation of migrant women, Franciscans International urges the Commission on the Status of Women to:

- Include the protection and empowerment of migrant women in achieving gender equality in the future programme of work;

¹ IOM. *World Migration Report 2005: Costs and Benefits of International Migration*. Section 3.

² E/CN.4/2005/85.

- Reform working methods to facilitate the greater inclusion and participation of relevant special mechanisms of the Commission on Human Rights (or future Human Rights Council) such as the Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, Special Rapporteur on Trafficking, and Special Rapporteur on the human rights of Migrants.

Franciscans International urges members States to:

- Ratify and implement the International Convention on the Protection of Migrant Workers and ILO Conventions 97 and 143 on migrant workers;
- Implement development policies and strategies which are gender-sensitive, paying specific attention to the participation and challenges of migrant women. Migrant women's groups should be effectively involved in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of development and integration policies;
- Incorporate a gender perspective in migration policies and programmes which must also have greater national and international coherence, capacity and cooperation;
- Inform migrant women of their rights and responsibilities under international and national laws and develop educational and communications programmes taking into consideration their cultural and linguistic backgrounds;
- Review and amend relevant national laws regarding migration to include a gender perspective, incorporating the circumstances migrant women face especially when claiming status based on their relationship to men.

Franciscans International also notes that the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa which entered into force in November 2005 includes enhanced protections for women in development and politics, building upon the rights recognized in the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.

Franciscans International would, therefore, like to call upon:

- State parties to the Protocol to promptly implement its provisions, and those who are not yet parties to ratify it without reservations which may inhibit its effectiveness;
 - States to strengthen and reinforce the promotion and protection of the rights of women at the regional level as well.
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