Commission on the Status of Women
Sixtieth session
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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and
to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled
“Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for
the twenty-first century”

Statement submitted by Armenian Relief Society, Canadian
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International Federation of Women Lawyers, International
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Catholic Women of England and Wales, National Council of
Women of the United States, Passionists International, Salesian
Missions, Salvation Army, Sisters of Charity Federation, Society of
Catholic Medical Missionaries, UNANIMA International and
Widows for Peace through Democracy, non-governmental
organizations 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 Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations, together with nineteen other organizations welcome the priority theme “Women’s empowerment and its link to sustainable development,” and review theme “The elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls” (agreed conclusions from the fifty-seventh session) for the sixtieth session of Commission on the Status of Women. These themes are an opportunity to create synergies between what has been agreed with regard to ending all gender-based violence since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and to accelerate implementation.

The inclusion of a goal on gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls in “Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” is evidence of the collective energy and commitment of UN-Women, Members States and civil society groups. Further, mainstreaming gender equality throughout the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adds substantively to the potential realization of Goal Five in that gender equality is now regarded as integral to the three pillars of sustainable development — the social, the environmental and the economic.

The targets pertaining to Goal Five are very specific. They call for ending discrimination against all women and girls everywhere, and eliminating all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation. These targets are critical to sustainable development and express a moral imperative toward the achievement of human rights, based on the dignity of the person.

Our organizations wishes to address the Commission on behalf of one group of women and girls who are extremely vulnerable to the denial of their human rights and are often excluded from conversations about rights and sustainability; that group is prostituted persons. We do applaud and support the recent development of networks of women who have successfully exited prostitution and who speak openly of the exploitative nature of prostitution, its stigmatization and consequent discrimination.

For over two hundred years the Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd has involved itself with the situations of women in prostitution and we have continually addressed the issue within various economic, social and cultural contexts. A system of prostitution is “incompatible with the dignity and worth of the human person” as stated in the United Nations Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others (1949)

The Charter of the United Nations as well as the preamble to Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development echo and re-echo the phrase ‘dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women.’(Charter of the United Nations) The continuance of the system of prostitution undermines both dignity of the person and equality.

Prostitution is enabled by a patriarchal system in which it is embedded. Patriarchy is composed of six structures: the patriarchal mode of production,
patriarchal relations in paid work, patriarchal relations in the state, male violence, patriarchal relations in sexuality and patriarchal relations in cultural institutions. These six structures core issues being addressed in a holistic and integrated way with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The aspiration of a transformed world where no one is left behind, where human dignity and rights inform all relationships with people and with the planet demand a radical shift in consciousness, attitude and behaviour.

Thoughtful attention to patriarchal relations in sexuality, specifically as it relates to the system of prostitution, is one such radical shift required for the fulfilment of dignity and gender equality. In fact, under patriarchy, we currently witness systems of commercial exploitation of women and girls being reframed as simply part of the market economy — the commercial sex industry — as if sexual slavery, inequality and gender-based violence are in some way extrinsic to this experience. The promotion of the commercial sex industry serves to legitimize prostitution, which is violence against women and girls.

Insights from the Special Rapporteur on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography in her report to the General Assembly (31 July 2015, A/70/222, Paragraph 30 & 31) bear out my point. “Sexual exploitation of girls is often rooted in patriarchal structures that promote male sexual domination and do not condemn the commercialization of girls and women. Culturally imposed feminine gender stereotypes also contribute to sexual exploitation of women and girls by placing them in the role of serving males, negating the ability to make decisions regarding their own sexual and reproductive life and making them prime targets for sexual violence.”

Gender-based discrimination and inequalities, patriarchal structures that promote male sexual domination, and culturally imposed feminine gender stereotypes all contribute to the sexual exploitation of women and girls. These discriminatory attitudes inherently demean women, permitting objectification and commercialization and infringing their rights and dignity. The feminization of poverty and global migration patterns also foster the continuance of the system of prostitution of women and girls, abandoned widows and their daughters being a particularly vulnerable group.

From long experience accompanying women who have been in prostitution, our organizations knows that prostitution is a form of gender-based violence that inflicts severe damage and risks the physical and psychological health of women and girls. It is the exercise of power and control of male access to female bodies from female genital mutilation to child marriage; from domestic violence to reproductive rights. The exchange of money for such access does not eliminate the violence women face in prostitution or the sex trade. We know that prostitution is a lucrative business, mostly controlled by criminal groups, and it is tightly linked to trafficking of women and girls for sexual exploitation. The theoretical separation of the violence of trafficking and the inherent violence of prostitution serves only the criminals and profiteers; they are not separate phenomena. They are inextricably entwined with gender inequality and male dominance and the continued debasement of women.
Recommendations

We call on Members States to:

• Implement fully all obligations under international law to eliminate the exploitation of prostitution including the

• United Nations Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Other (1949)

• United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all Form of Discrimination Against Women (1979) in particular article 6 “States Parties shall take all appropriate measures, including legislation, to suppress all forms of traffic in women and exploitation of prostitution of women.”


• Resource fully accelerated action plans towards realization of the Beijing Platform and the Agreed Conclusion of the fifty seventh Session of the Commission on the Status of Women on the “Elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls.” The Beijing Platform and the Agreed Conclusion are the underpinnings of Target 5.2 in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: “Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private sphere, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation.”

• Adopt a human rights model, of which we see an example in the Nordic Model, by approaching the issue of prostitution from gender equality, human rights and sustainable development perspective.

• Decriminalize fully women and girls in prostitution. Repeal all repressive measures against prostituted persons and offer them protection and exit options.

• Move the focus of regulation from prostituted women and girls to the demand (sex buyers, pimps, exploiters, traffickers, procures,) and criminalize persons who promote, procure or purchase sex.

• Implement nationally designed social protection floors according to International Labour Organization Recommendation 202, thus ensuring a minimum standard of living for all.