



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
11 December 2019

English only

Commission on the Status of Women

Sixty-fourth session

9–20 March 2020

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 Sanctuary for Families, Inc., 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

Sanctuary for Families respectfully submits this statement to urge the Commission on the Status of Women to address the trafficking and prostitution of women and girls. The inherent physical and mental injury and the loss of autonomy and self-determination that traffickers, pimps, and sex buyers inflict on women and girls directly conflicts with the fundamental tenets of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others, and the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights.

Sanctuary for Families is the largest non-governmental organization in New York State dedicated exclusively to addressing the multi-faceted needs of survivors of domestic violence, trafficking, and related forms of gender violence. Sanctuary for Families has served over 1,000 survivors of human trafficking, most of whom are immigrants. Sanctuary for Families offers legal, shelter, clinical, and economic empowerment services to survivors, advocates for policies and legislation to advance the rights of survivors and improve the structural response to gender violence, and conducts extensive community outreach, education, and training. Our advocacy is informed by the survivors' experiences.

Sex trafficking and exploitation of the prostitution of women are inextricably linked: demand for prostitution fuels trafficking, and trafficking cannot be eradicated without curtailing and ultimately eliminating demand. By connecting trafficking in women with exploitation of the prostitution of women, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action articulates a foundational principle that has long been recognized by the United Nations. The Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others in 1949 recognizes 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 and endanger the welfare of the individual, the family and the community".

Since the Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others, the United Nations has consistently recognized the connection between trafficking in women and exploitation of prostitution of women. This commitment was reasserted in Article 6 of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women, which declares that "States Parties shall take all appropriate measures, including legislation, to suppress all forms of traffic in women and exploitation of prostitution of women." The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action emphasizes that "implementation of the 1949 Convention as well as other relevant instruments needs to be reviewed and strengthened".

The definition of "trafficking in persons" contained in the 2000 Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children establishes that the exploitation component of trafficking must "at a minimum" include in its definition: "the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation". Most recently, the General Assembly adopted Resolution [73/146](#) encouraging governments to take preventative measures addressing "factors that encourage trafficking in women and girls for exploitation, including in prostitution and other forms of commercialized sex".

Factors contributing to the link between trafficking in women and exploitation of the prostitution of women include:

- The exploitation of the prostitution of women is an acute form of gender discrimination that perpetuates deep-seated gender stereotypes and widespread commodification of women's and girls' bodies. It socializes men and boys to regard women as objects, instills feelings of superiority and entitlement to women's bodies, and fosters a hostile masculine self-identification and likelihood to commit acts of sexual coercion. The system reinforces gender norms and stereotypical thinking regarding "male domination, sexual entitlement, coercion and control, which drive the demand for the gender-stereotyped services" of those who are trafficked and exploited in prostitution.
- Trafficking and prostitution intersect with domestic violence. Not uncommonly, women are trafficked by intimate partners, and traffickers may marry their victim to exert more control. Women in abusive relationships are more vulnerable and susceptible to trafficking and prostitution.
- Highly vulnerable women and girls are the most likely to be sexually exploited through prostitution or trafficking. Their vulnerabilities stem from factors including poverty, marginalization owing to race, caste or ethnicity, and migrant or refugee status. Women and girls experiencing these conditions are often exploited without actual or threatened use of physical force. Those who are exploited in prostitution are often found to have a history of gender-based violence, especially sexual abuse in childhood.
- The commercial sex industry fuels sex trafficking. The direct correlation between increased demand for commercial sex and increased demand for sex trafficking is well-documented.
- The commercial sex industry perpetuates gender-based discrimination, which in turn contributes to trafficking. The commercial sex industry and its buyers subscribe to a gendered ideological system, replete with stereotypes that reinforce a system predicated on male superiority over and ownership of women, and the commodification of female bodies. Both buyers and sellers of trafficked and commercially sexually-exploited women and girls subject them to overt acts of violence, including battering and rape, as well as other types of traumatizing experiences that likewise constitute abuse.
- Women who have "voluntarily" entered into the sex trade evidence the same vulnerabilities and are subject to the same pressures and traumatic effects as women who are trafficked. The harm they incur is as considerable as that of trafficked women. False distinction between women in the sex trade and trafficking victims reduces the ability of exploited women and girls to receive treatment for their physical and psychological injuries and to seek educational and economic opportunities.
- Women and girls exploited in prostitution are routinely subjected to rape and other extreme forms of physical, sexual, and psychological violence; many are killed. Women and girls in prostitution sustain levels of post-traumatic stress disorder comparable to those of war veterans. Many develop substance abuse problems while coping with trauma. Many suffer reproductive and other health problems.
- The exploitation of women and girls in prostitution denies them the human right to education, essential for the exercise of all other human rights, and it leaves them severely economically disadvantaged. Because many are exploited in prostitution from a young age, they are deprived of educational and work-related opportunities essential to economic independence and to attaining an adequate standard of living.

It is impossible to pursue equality, development, and peace for women without addressing the harms of trafficking and prostitution, especially when criminal justice systems worldwide have failed to protect survivors or to hold perpetrators of trafficking, including buyers, accountable. Moreover, it is impossible to end trafficking of women in regions that condone punishing women and girls who are exploited in prostitution or confer immunity on their exploiters. Such regimes fail to investigate, prosecute, and punish those who exploit women and girls in prostitution, thereby re-victimizing the exploited and giving exploiters license to harm women and girls.

We urge the Commission on the Status of Women to support the Equality Model, implemented by Sweden in 1999, and subsequently adopted by Norway, Iceland, France, Canada, Ireland, Northern Ireland, and Israel. Premised on the understanding that prostitution is a severe form of gender-based violence, the Equality Model encourages collaboration among social service agencies, the media, politicians, and law enforcement to change the social norms that enable the sex industry to flourish. The social transformation advanced by the Equality Model includes a government commitment to eradicating poverty and increasing education and employment access for marginalized communities. Three equally important components exist: (1) community education to change norms that enable prostitution to flourish; (2) extensive, social and legal services support to survivors; and (3) a law enforcement response that deters buyers, pimps, and other exploiters in prostitution by holding them criminally accountable, while ending the survivors' re-victimization through arrest and prosecution.

Adoption and implementation of the Equality Model is essential to achieving Strategic objective D.1. of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Trafficking and prostitution constitute severe practices of violence against women that reduce the most vulnerable women and girls to commodities in a ruthlessly exploitative and destructive global marketplace, and they advance social norms that encourage men and boys to objectify and dehumanize women and girls as a group, endangering the safety of all women and girls. Beijing+25 presents an opportunity to governments and civil society alike to create a paradigmatic policy shift from a world in which women and girls are bought and sold to one where their equality is recognized and respected.
