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entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and
peace for the twenty-first century”

Statement submitted by Jerusalem Institute of Justice, 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 Jerusalem Institute of Justice is an Israeli non-profit organization that works in the local and international arena in order to promote and protect human and civil rights. We provide free legal representation for those whose voices are not heard and work to eradicate human trafficking in Israel.

The Jerusalem Institute of Justice welcomes the theme of the 67th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women, “Innovation and technological change, and education in the digital age for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls”.

While technological changes and innovations present a tool for furthering the empowerment and equality of women, we must also be aware of the risks that women and girls face due to these advancements. In today's digital age, internet prostitution offers selection, secrecy, and accessibility. The computer age has seen technological changes that have increased the prevalence of prostitution, with social media fuelling an internationally recognizable growth in sex trafficking. Traffickers are using social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, and Tinder as recruiting tools, driving the rise of prostitution. For example, the most popular tool to find persons engaging in prostitution in Israel is the dating app Tinder. As an insidious system that promotes violence, objectification, and degradation of women, sex trafficking and prostitution are rising threats to female empowerment and equality. The growth of prostitution for these reasons is worrying and the response should combine the targeting of recruitment methods and the promotion of education along with a reconceptualization of how governments deal with the issue of prostitution.

We, the Jerusalem Institute of Justice, have initiated ‘Project NOA’ (Not Objects Anymore) and are a key player in the promotion of a new legislative framework in Israel based on the Swedish legal model of combatting prostitution (called the Nordic or neo-abolitionist model). The Nordic model fines those guilty of consuming prostitution, classing it as a civil offense. The law also provides education for the public and support services to those in the sex trade. Decriminalizing the prostituted person acknowledges that the industry is not freely chosen and that the prostituted person is the victim of economic and sexual exploitation at the hands of the procurer and buyer of sexual services. Prostitution cannot be considered a legitimate profession when multiple studies have found that the average age of entry is fourteen years old. The Nordic model's ultimate aim is to abolish the sex industry, and this can only be achieved by criminalizing the buyers of sex, as that will lead to a drastic reduction in demand. With that being said, we must also understand that the evolution of internet prostitution requires governments to develop an even more comprehensive strategy-based solution to protect women.

The Nordic model has been successfully implemented in Sweden, Norway, Iceland, Canada, Northern Ireland, France, Ireland, and as of 2020, Israel. The Prohibition on Consuming Prostitution Act was passed by the Israeli Parliament in December 2018 and has been in effect since July 2020, with enforcement beginning in January 2021. In addition to prohibiting the purchase of sex in Israel, the law also prohibits being present in a location chiefly used for prostitution, such as a brothel. The law imposes fines of 2,000 shekels (\$555), which double for a second offense. Repeat violations could carry fines of up to 75,300 shekels (\$20,000) and criminal prosecution. The law also offers psychoeducational group sessions for the buyers of sex - which are aimed at changing their opinions on buying sex services. The Israeli Parliament also approved a 90 million shekel (\$25,000,000) programme aimed at the rehabilitation of former sex workers and their reintegration into the labour market.

The Israeli law offers a holistic approach that focuses not only on prohibiting paying for sex but also on educating the public about the dangers of the sex industry.

The technological era in which we live today poses many dangers to women. The platform Onlyfans was founded in 2016 and has since emerged as the top platform worldwide for creators to sell erotic content. Masked as a social network that sells content and art, Onlyfans is just a simple way for sex to be sold for money on the internet. And a third of users advertising explicitly sexual images on Twitter are underage. This new version of internet prostitution is designed to lure people and distract them from the reality of the human damage caused by the sex industry.

To conclude, sex trafficking and prostitution should not be deemed acceptable in any society, and should be tackled in all its forms: traditional and online prostitution. Today, there is a successful answer to traditional prostitution through adoption of the Nordic model which both prevents more women from entering prostitution as well as provides rehabilitation for those trying to leave. It decreases rates of prostitution and thus allows for the advancement of women's equality. The results of the implementation of the Nordic model in Sweden had the desired effect of decreasing rates of street prostitution, with an overall decrease between 1999 and 2008 of 80%. However, the rise in online prostitution which has seen young girls being recruited en masse through social media, must be stopped.

Call to Action

The Jerusalem Institute of Justice has fought for over 14 years to end the sex trade in Israel. We have developed policy and educated the public, using community collaborations and social media campaigns, to promote the abolition of sex trade in Israel. After we successfully helped to achieve the adoption of the Nordic model in Israel, it is our wish to see this model implemented across the world. We propose today that there needs to be mass adoption of the Nordic model in the fight against prostitution, as part of the greater fight for female equality and empowerment. We also call on all nations to think of ways to combat the new phenomenon of online prostitution.
