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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**

Statement submitted by Sociologists for Women in Society, 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.



Statement

Sociologists for Women in Society is an American non-profit scientific and educational organization of sociologists dedicated to improving women's lives and creating feminist social change. Through our teaching, research, publications and activism, we educate and sensitize the sociological profession, other scholars and the public to the social, political and economic situation of women. We publish a highly regarded professional journal, *Gender & Society*, and engage with a network of sister organizations on several continents through our Global Feminist Partnership programme. Two of our feminist partners, the Center of Women's and Family Studies at Zhejiang Academy of Social Sciences in Hangzhou, China, and the Centro di Studi Interdisciplinari di Genere in Trento, Italy, contributed to this statement.

Sociologists for Women in Society affirms the comprehensive definition of violence against women in the Beijing Platform for Action adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women. Physical, sexual and psychological violence against women and girls occurs in the family, the general community and in State institutions. Women belonging to minority groups, indigenous women, refugee women, migrant women, women living in rural or remote communities, destitute women, women in institutions or detention, female children, women with disabilities, elderly women and women in situations of armed conflict are particularly vulnerable to violence (Beijing Platform for Action, para. 116).

Violence against women is one of the crucial social mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position compared with men (*ibid.*, para. 117). It is a manifestation of the historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men and to the prevention of women's full advancement (*ibid.*, para. 118). Violence against women derives from traditional and customary practices that perpetuate the lower status of women in the family, the workplace, the community and society, as well as from media images of violence against women and women's lack of legal protection (*ibid.*).

In view of the widespread persistence of gender-based violence, as articulated in the Beijing Platform for Action, our organization and its partners urge Member States to institute laws criminalizing violence against women and girls in order to protect their rights to life, safety and property, including in their domicile. Police and court personnel should receive specialized training to ensure a proper and effective response to women and girls who report violence, including violence perpetrated by intimate partners and other family members. Police departments should actively recruit and train female officers and develop specialized units to respond to violence against women and girls. Municipalities should take steps to coordinate services to victims of gender-based violence among police, the courts, prisons, probation officers, social services and health-care providers. Member States should provide generous funding for networks of shelters and counselling centres for women and girls fleeing from violence and dealing with its physical and emotional ramifications.

To protect women and girls, Member States should actively cultivate a culture of peace, paying special attention to violence perpetrated in State institutions such as partner and sexual violence in the military and violence by police and prison

officials, especially towards minority-group women. We urgently demand that United Nations peacekeeping missions eliminate sexual violence by United Nations peacekeepers and safeguard women and girls in refugee camps. We deplore and condemn the use of sexual violence as a tactic of war to achieve military and political objectives, as acknowledged by the Security Council in its resolutions 1820 (2008), 1888 (2009), and 1960 (2010). We recognize that women and girls are often associated with fighting forces as combatants, field operations support, or sex slaves and forced “bush wives”. We encourage Member States to identify women ex-combatants as resources for the implementation of Council resolution 1325 (2000), aimed at developing the capacity of women police officers and soldiers to challenge dominant patriarchal approaches to security. We urge Member States to support the seven-point action plan on gender-responsive peacebuilding, as discussed in the UN-Women Sourcebook on Women, Peace and Security.

One of the most effective means of reducing violence against women and girls is through educational efforts that seek to achieve a better understanding of the causes of violence, shape public opinion concerning gender-based violence, engage men as partners for equality, and promote services addressing the needs of victims. We encourage Member States to develop and fund educational programmes challenging female subordination and promoting equitable gender relationships at all stages of life. Since women and girls experience high rates of violence in every aspect of their lives — in their homes, in schools, in work and in their communities — educational programmes that focus on supporting equitable gender relationships will contribute to new norms to safeguard the human rights of women and girls. School-based educational programmes at primary and secondary levels hold special promise in helping youth establish equitable gender relationships and providing a safe place for girls and boys to recognize and report violence and to strategize alternatives. Community education programmes offer women a place to learn about available services and how to deal with abusive relationships, and they allow men to examine the role that hegemonic masculinity plays in perpetrating violence against women and girls. To protect women, and to improve gender norms, more programmes to re-educate violent men are needed. Programmes aimed at the media can help set ethical guidelines for reporting violence against women and girls to avoid revictimization.

The issue of international trafficking for the purpose of the sex trade, as well as the issues of forced prostitution, rape, sexual abuse and sex tourism (*ibid.*, para. 122) remain significant problems. Sex trafficking is the most pervasive and illicit manifestation of globalization and global capital expansion, structured in multiple and multilevel inequalities. As a global, gendered issue, trafficking manifests across boundaries on a worldwide scale, with young girls and women being the majority of victims and survivors. Over the past decade, scholars, activists and policymakers have defined a comprehensive human trafficking paradigm that sees the phenomenon not as a single event but as processes with various steps that begin with recruitment, continue with the trafficking of the person and the infliction of harm, and ending with recovery and integration. This thinking highlights the need to focus on the safety and security of women and children as well as development policies and opportunities in the countries of origin to ensure women’s economic and financial stability. We urge Member States to cooperate on a regional and subregional basis to stem the flow of international trafficking, providing trafficking victims with social, economic and political protection. Non-resident victims in particular need legal assistance to deal with complex immigration and visa issues.

Violence against women and girls includes violence based on the expression of gender identity and sexual orientation. In all regions of the world, transgender individuals face multiple forms of violence on a daily basis. As the High Commissioner for Human Rights has noted, 76 countries retain laws that are used to criminalize people on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity (A/HRC/19/41, para. 40). In all Member States, transgender individuals face civil harassment, violence and sexual assault; in some, State-perpetrated violence, including the death penalty, death threats and torture, occurs (see A/HRC/19/41).¹

Individuals facing violence based on their expression of gender identity or sexual orientation are protected under current human rights law, as shown in the Yogyakarta Principles (www.yogyakartaprinciples.org). A recent publication of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Born Free and Equal* (HR/PUB/12/06), urges Member States to protect people from transphobic and homophobic violence, prevent torture and degrading treatment, repeal laws criminalizing homosexuality and fluid gender expression, prohibit discrimination and safeguard freedom of expression. We urge the Commission on the Status of Women to integrate agreed language concerning sexual orientation and gender identity contained in general recommendation No. 28 (2010) of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, which states that “discrimination [against] women based on sex and gender is inextricably linked with other factors that affect women, such as race, ethnicity, religion or belief, health, status, age, class, caste, and sexual orientation and gender identity” (para. 18).

The absence of adequate gender-disaggregated data and statistics on the incidence of violence makes the elaboration of programmes and monitoring of changes difficult (Beijing Platform for Action, para. 120). According to Dr. H. A. Jansen, statistics on violence against women and girls can be used to make violence visible by raising awareness of the extent of the problem, to guide policy reforms and to monitor progress in violence prevention. As sociologists, we encourage Member States to prioritize the adoption of internationally comparable indicators on violence against women and girls such as those proposed by the United Nations Statistical Commission. The indicators should measure, disaggregated by age and relationship of victim to perpetrator, the prevalence, severity and frequency of physical, sexual and psychological violence against women and girls, including intimate partner violence, child sexual abuse and spousal homicide; they should include due diligence indicators to measure prevention efforts by Member States. The World Health Organization *WHO Multi-country Study on Health and Domestic Violence against Women* is a useful model for the development of standardized surveys, including training of interviewers and safety of respondents. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime should develop standardized gender-disaggregated indicators for use by police departments and court systems to assess the effectiveness of Member States in responding to violence against women and girls.

¹ See also Michael O’Flaherty and John Fisher, “Sexual orientation, gender identity and international human rights law”: contextualising the Yogyakarta Principles, *Human Rights Law Review*, vol. 8, No. 2 (2008), pp. 207-224; and Human Rights Watch, *Together, Apart: Organizing around Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Worldwide*, 2009.