



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
17 November 2015

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women

Sixtieth session

14-24 March 2016

**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 European Women’s Lobby, International
Alliance of Women, National Federation of International
Immigrant Women Associations and Sveriges Kvinnolobby,
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 world is experiencing the biggest refugee challenge since the World War II. War, conflicts and climate change are forcing people to leave their homes. Peace and security for all, women and men, boys and girls, is a prerequisite for sustainable development. In light of the Commission on the Status of Women 60 theme, “Women’s empowerment and its link to sustainable development”, our organizations call on all United Nations Member States to address the inhuman situation for women and girls fleeing war and conflicts. All Member States have to ensure that actions for refugees have a conscious gender perspective and that the particular vulnerability of women and girls is put in focus.

War, conflicts and climate change often hits women and children the most. Both women and men are victims of war and conflict, and are fleeing their homes. But fewer women make their way to a safer place. Women and girls do not have the same opportunities as men and boys to cross borders and are more often left behind in conflict areas or refugee camps. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, only 11 per cent of the people who fled over the Mediterranean Sea in 2014 were women. United Nations Member States must take action to ensure that women and their accompanying children are given special priority.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees says 36 million people were displaced by natural disasters in 2009, the last year such a report was taken. Scientists predict this number will rise to at least 50 million by 2050. Some say it could be as high as 200 million. Climate change hits the poorest and most vulnerable people the most, a majority of which are women and girls. Climate change has to be recognized as a significant threat to global peace and security.

Several circumstances make the escape more difficult for women, such as breastfeeding, menstruating and being pregnant, and women often have the responsibility for children. The lack of drinking water causes kidney problems for many pregnant and nursing women. United Nations Member States have to allocate more resources for women’s necessities in refugee camps and war zones, especially access to reproductive and sexual health care.

Sexual abuse and violence are used as strategies to deprive women and girls of their civil and human rights. During their dangerous journeys, many women and young girls are exposed to sexual violence, rape, prostitution and trafficking. Women and girls are being forced to have sex in exchange for food and housing. One of many consequences can be unwanted and child pregnancies without the access to safe abortion or healthcare. Because of a lack of protection, women and girls who are victims of sexual violence will not have access to justice and support. United Nations Member States must take urgent action to combat all violations against women’s human rights, including sexual abuse and trafficking.

Sex trafficking and prostitution can only be combated by addressing the demand for commercial sex, i.e. the buyers, traffickers and pimps. Governments must criminalize the purchase of sex, brothels, pimping, and all parts of trafficking for sexual purposes. The persons in prostitution should never be criminalized. This is in accordance with the United Nations 1949 Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others, and the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against

Women, which declare that States must take all appropriate measures, including action, to suppress all forms of traffic in women and exploitation of prostitution of women (Article 6).

The refugee challenge is a humanitarian and urgent issue. A gender perspective has to be included in all refugee policies, and the issue has to be met in the Agenda 2030. Our organizations urge United Nations Member States to:

- Ensure a gender perspective in all refugee policies, actions in conflict zones, refugee camps and during asylum processes. The particularly vulnerable situation for women and girls has to be addressed.
- Allocate additional resources for women's necessities and take urgent action to combat sexual abuse and trafficking in conflict areas and refugee camps.
- Criminalize the purchase of sex, brothels, pimping and trafficking for sexual exploitation in order to prevent women and girls subjected to trafficking and prostitution.
- Allocate more resources and support to women's organizations and their activities for women and children fleeing war and conflicts.
- Help women and girls to cross borders and seek asylum. Women and their accompanying children should have a particular priority among refugees.
- Ensure that asylum procedures at borders comply with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Guidelines on International Protection (Gender-related persecution within the context of Article 1(2) of the 1951 Convention and/or its 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugee, 7 May 2002). In particular, guideline n°35 states that "Persons raising gender-related refugee claims, and survivors of torture and trauma in particular, require a supportive environment where they can be reassured of the confidentiality of their claim. Some claimant, because of the shame they feel over what has happened to them, may be reluctant to identify the true extent of the persecution suffered or feared."
- Ensure that asylum officials inform women of gender aspects of the refugee definition thus clarifying that fear of gender-based violence and discrimination may constitute a valid basis for refugee status.
- Increase the security and protection upon arrival at the final destination, for instance accommodation, resources for women who are pregnant or have small children, and support for women who are victims of violence and abuse.
- Ensure the active participation of women in peace processes in accordance with the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR1325) on 'Women, Peace and Security'. Women should be included in peace negotiations, post-conflict reconstruction, disarmament, humanitarian relief and peace building.
- Recognize climate change as a significant threat to global peace and security, and ensure a gender perspective in all actions for climate refugees.

About the Swedish Women's Lobby:

The Swedish Women's Lobby is a politically and religiously independent umbrella organization for women's organizations in Sweden. We work to fulfil women's full human rights and towards a gender equal society within Sweden, the European Union and internationally. The Swedish Women's Lobby is based on feminist grounds and gather 45 member organizations. The foundations of our activities are the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women and the Beijing Platform for Action.

International Alliance of Women

European Women's Lobby

Sveriges Kvinnolobby
