



## Economic and Social Council

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### Commission on the Status of Women

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### Statement submitted by Coalition Against Trafficking in Women, 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.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

The Coalition against Trafficking in Women, a non-governmental organization working toward the elimination of the sexual exploitation of women and girls and the realization of gender equality, urges the Commission on the Status of Women to address the issue of trafficking of women and girls from rural communities. This widespread crime is a current and growing challenge to achieving the empowerment of rural women and girls.

Poverty and the isolation of women and girls in rural areas makes them vulnerable to exploitation by traffickers. Rural populations in many countries are among the most impoverished, causing growing numbers of rural women and girls to be sold into prostitution or forced labour within rural communities, to urban areas and across national borders. Additionally, rural women and girls often lack access to social services that address gender-based violence and discrimination. These vulnerabilities compound human traffickers' abilities to coerce, entice and deceive women and girls into sexual exploitation and forced labour to satisfy the demand for, respectively, prostitution and cheap or free labour for untold profit. Women and girls trafficked into the commercial sex trade suffer extreme violence and discrimination at the hands of traffickers and other exploiters, including sex buyers, while those trafficked for labour servitude are equally vulnerable to sexual violence and sexual exploitation, including commercial sexual exploitation on farms.

These human rights violations occur in every country of the world, often with impunity. This is especially true in countries that have not enacted or implemented national laws and policies addressing human trafficking and sexual exploitation that fully reflect the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children. Governments must pay particular attention to the Protocol's definition of human trafficking in Article 3 and their obligation to strengthen legislative or other measures to discourage the demand that fosters all forms of exploitation leading to trafficking under Article 9.5.

The effects of globalization on agriculture and small-scale industries, which are often the main sources of income in rural economies, have been devastating. The disappearance of jobs in local industries and agriculture has disproportionately affected women. Furthermore, due to systemic gender inequality, women continue to be discriminated against in employment. Girls' education is often neglected in rural areas, where there is limited access to free universal elementary school education and vocational training, negatively affecting their ability to reach their potential. Such lack of choices and opportunities in rural communities increases the vulnerability of women and girls to traffickers who seek to exploit them.

Motivated by the high profitability of trafficking in women and girls, coupled with low risk of punishment for these crimes, the commercial sex industry has grown exponentially within and across national borders. For instance, globalization has increased sex tourism, particularly in developing countries, to satisfy the demand of both local and foreign sex buyers. Additionally, the Internet has become an inexpensive and powerful tool for traffickers to engage in the sale of women and girls, including those from rural communities. Reports also indicate that an overwhelming number of women from rural areas in developing or emerging economies populate both legal and illegal sex establishments, including brothels, in industrialized nations. Labour trafficking also results in high profits for exploiters and rural women and girls are at high risk of being trafficked into domestic servitude as well as exploitative factory, farm or other work.

Rural women and girls are trafficked both internationally and within the borders of their own countries, and traffickers particularly exploit the migration of women, including rural women. Women who are enticed to migrate often do so as a last resort to escape poverty, find a source of income for themselves and provide urgent financial assistance for their families. They are frequently lured by traffickers' promises of legitimate employment through migration, but are sold instead into the commercial sex trade or are exploited in forced labour. Often, governments and law enforcement agencies categorize trafficked women and girls as consenting to dangerous migration patterns or wilfully violating immigration laws, without inquiry into the means, including deception, coercion or debt bondage, through which she entered a foreign country. Member States must remember that international law is clear: when any means of trafficking is present, including abuse of power or abuse of someone's vulnerability, the consent of a trafficking victim is irrelevant.

To empower rural women and girls, the widespread scope of trafficking, both for sexual exploitation and forced labour, within and from rural communities must be acknowledged and measures must be taken to assist victims and hold exploiters accountable. The clear relationship between sex trafficking and its end goal, the sex trade, including prostitution and pornography, must also be recognized. The United Nations Trafficking in Persons Protocol and Article 6 of the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women specifically mandate Member States to combat the exploitation of the prostitution of others. The sex trade is a cause and consequence of gender-based violence and discrimination. The harms it inflicts upon women and girls are in direct violation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and it can never be a source of empowerment or legitimate employment for any woman, including those living in rural communities. Instead, states must adopt and adequately fund programs aimed at providing women and girls with services and dignified employment opportunities.

If gender equality is to be achieved, the United Nations, governments and civil society must take action to prevent and eradicate all forms of violence and exploitation of all women and girls, including trafficking. We urge them to:

- Create policies that address and seek to eradicate violence and discrimination against women and girls, including sexual violence.
- Develop social and economic structures to combat harmful cultural practices that foster gender-based violence and discrimination and can lead to trafficking in women and girls.
- Eliminate economic practices and discriminatory policies, including poverty and discrimination based on race, national origin, ethnicity or religion, that render rural women and girls vulnerable to trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation.
- Implement educational curricula, on a national basis in all regions, that promote gender equality, emphasizing the harms of gender stereotypes, sexual exploitation, sexual violence and the objectification of women and girls.
- Develop and implement safe migration programs and provide support to migrant populations, especially women and girls.
- Promote the adoption of policies that encourage transparent business practices, clean supply chains, and fair wages and working conditions for all employees.
- Ensure equal and free access to education and the establishment of literacy programs for rural women and girls.

- Adequately fund programs aimed at preventing violence against women and providing services to survivors in rural communities.
- Adequately fund and support services for victims and survivors of international and domestic trafficking and sexual exploitation, including exit programs with financial assistance, education and job training, employment opportunities, housing, medical care, legal advocacy, residency permits and language training.
- Promote effective laws against trafficking, prostitution and related forms of sexual exploitation, including provisions based on gender equality penalizing the demand (sex buyers) for prostitution while solely decriminalizing women bought and sold in the sex trade.
- Reject government policies promoting prostitution, whether through legalization or decriminalization of the sex trade, in violation of international law.
- Reject the misleading term “sex work”, which normalizes the abuse and exploitation of prostitution and attempts to redefine the sex trade as a viable employer for impoverished and marginalized women.
- Ratify and implement the Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others; the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women; the Convention on the Rights of the Child; and the Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime and its Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children.

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