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**Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and
the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly:**

**priority theme: promoting empowerment of people in
achieving poverty eradication, social integration and
full employment and decent work for all**

Statement submitted by Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, 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

Introduction

Sisters of Mercy of the Americas welcomes the opportunity to present to the fifty-second session of the Commission for Social Development our deep concerns relative to the empowerment of people in achieving poverty eradication, social integration and full employment and decent work for all.

The goal of empowerment remains dangerously imperilled by rampant and worldwide gender inequality, exclusion and disempowerment. Poverty is structurally and systemically embedded. Jobless growth and trafficked labour keep costs at a minimum and erode the ideal of decent and full employment. Specifically, these persistent social ills so rampant yet accepted throughout the world community lay bare the root causes of violence against women that render them poor, vulnerable, and, too often, prey to human trafficking.

Poverty and work

An unsustainable, exploitative and competitive model of development that views work as a commodity contributes to a downward spiral that disproportionately affects females of all ages, especially those in rural areas, and renders them more vulnerable to becoming victims of human trafficking.

The demand for trafficked persons shapes and is facilitated by the prevailing model of development, which fuels sexual and labour exploitation in order to drive growth and profit. It also feeds on the social and economic vulnerability of women and girls. Every girl or woman considered “less than” has little or no value and can “legitimately” be objectified, sold, raped and beaten into servitude for labour or sexual exploitation. Moreover, she serves as a renewable source of income because she can be sold and resold until she becomes a useless and unprofitable liability owing to infirmity or age. Above all, she must continue to be deprived of education, which can empower her and lead her to freedom from her slave master.

Our experience in working with trafficked women confirms that economic, social, political and human rights deprivation and gross inequality and discrimination increase the woman’s burden and desperation to provide for herself and her family. She thus becomes the perfect prey. Unaware of her rights and the dangers of trafficking and beleaguered by poor opportunities at home, she is prey to false promises and expectations of employment, education and wealth. At times sold by her family, the woman or girl finds only deception, intimidation, servitude, rape and debt bondage in addition to physical and psychological abuse. Bereft of her former life and isolated from family and cultural and religious beliefs, she enters a shadow world of coercion and violence.

Even while global development conversations speak of poverty eradication, Governments continue to treat the symptoms rather than the root causes of poverty and to promote an unsustainable growth model of development that values profit over life. As the gap between rich and poor widens and women’s inequality increases, not only are people socially and economically disempowered, but their very lives are also at risk. Moreover, Governments are failing to systematically address the multiple and systemic drivers of inequality and discrimination: women are excluded from decision-making, land ownership, access to natural, financial and

technological resources critical to livelihood, education and decent jobs. Well-being comes at great social cost.

Furthermore, the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights reports that the disproportionate responsibility that women have for unpaid work is a major social and economic barrier to their involvement in the labour market. She insists that not only do they perform unpaid work but they stay poor as a result, as the amount, intensity and drudgery of unpaid work increase with poverty and social exclusion. Many of their most basic human rights — the right to work, education and participation — are deeply compromised.

Empowerment

In discussions of the global and national post-2015 development agenda and the sustainable development goals, Member States must focus on the disempowerment of women, which renders them vulnerable to human trafficking. States must address the root causes of systemic poverty, unemployment and gender inequality. This requires rigorous studies of the impact of globalization and of the global economic, trade, agriculture and financial policy decisions on women's opportunities for social and economic development and empowerment. Evidence-based studies leading to effective policy decisions are key elements in this effort.

Moreover, partnership between victims of trafficking and those providing services and preparing legislation is crucial to developing a global plan of action to prevent human trafficking. Currently, trafficked people have not been adequately empowered to make decisions regarding their lives and futures. They have few opportunities to tell their stories, to define what empowerment means to them and to identify the services that they need. Member States must "walk with" trafficked people as equal partners in the process of their empowerment. For example, women should be actively engaged in the discussion on how the current model of development increases their vulnerability to human trafficking. They should be asked to name: (a) the aspects of the prevailing development model that enable and perpetuate trafficking; (b) the characteristics of a model that would prevent trafficking; and (c) the effective practices for the empowerment of women that will eradicate trafficking.

Going forward

Some progress has been made, but more must be done. Several initiatives include the following:

(a) Globally, article 9 of the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, calls upon States parties to adopt measures to alleviate poverty, underdevelopment and lack of equal opportunity. Today, 154 States have ratified the Trafficking in Persons Protocol. Although legislation remains weak, it is encouraging that 134 States now have legislation addressing human trafficking. The European Union, for example, has focused on combating human trafficking through the European treaties and national legislation, and it recently provided funding for a European Union Anti-Trafficking Coordinator;

(b) A critically important initiative in addressing the demand side of trafficking is the action taken by a number of national Governments to decriminalize the provider of sex and to criminalize the purchaser of sex;

(c) The universal periodic review process of the Human Rights Council provides an important tool to both raise awareness of the protocol and to challenge Governments on their record of implementing legislation. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women also calls upon countries to address human trafficking, poverty, inequality, discrimination and unemployment;

(d) On the ground, non-governmental organizations and religious coalitions, such as the Australian Catholic Religious against Trafficking in Humans and the Religious in Europe Networking against Trafficking and Exploitation continue to address the structural and systemic causes of poverty and inequality. Nationally, these groups offer a counterweight to the issue of demand through education and lobbying for legislative change.

Despite these advances, applying the Trafficking in Persons Protocol has been haphazard owing to the lack of political will. There is a critical need for a dedicated coordinating body at the national level with sufficient funds and political clout to ensure a coherent policy for implementing legislation to combat human trafficking in conjunction with social, economic and sustainable development policies, in the light of the global vision for a transformative post-2015 development agenda.

Finally, no advancement in the prevention of human trafficking and in the social, legal, economic and political empowerment of women will be realized without adequate funding. Global economic crises have diminished or eliminated funding for programmes to eradicate trafficking, empower victims and strengthen prevention — all of which require long-term commitment and ongoing subsidy and investment.

Recommendations

Steps to realize this outcome address the issues of:

(a) Employment:

(i) Determine and adopt specific goals and targets to provide a living wage, close the gender pay gap, create decent and permanent labour opportunities and regulate care services and informal sector work for women;

(ii) Attack the demand for trafficking and the profiteering of traffickers and enact legislation to punish the master and perpetrator rather than the slave;

(b) Empowerment:

(i) Establish comprehensive mechanisms for the participation of survivors of human trafficking as equal partners in optimizing social development and legal, social, economic and political empowerment;

(ii) Financially invest in and sustain partnerships between victims of trafficking and those providing services and preparing legislation;

(c) Implementation and monitoring:

(i) In countries that have ratified the Trafficking in Persons Protocol, appoint a national coordinator (similar to the position of the European Union

Anti-Trafficking Coordinator) to review the implementation of the Trafficking in Persons Protocol, especially the national legislation;

(ii) Exercise special powers to address all issues connected to the prevention of human trafficking and its relationship to the full realization of women's social, economic and legal employment and empowerment.

In order to achieve a stable and robust post-2015 development agenda and equally stable and robust sustainable development goals, Member States must address the root causes of disempowerment, systemic poverty and gender inequality. These fundamental injustices are sustained through a lack of political will and at great social cost — a price too high for the world community to pay.
