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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

We, members of the NGO Committee to Stop Trafficking in Persons, submit this joint statement on the extreme violence that continues to plague girls and women around the world in the form of human trafficking for commercial sexual exploitation. This egregious crime is one of the most profitable illicit activities and is one of the most pervasive and systematic human rights violations in the world today. Unlike drugs or arms, persons sold into sexual slavery can be sold repeatedly, making huge profits for their traffickers. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights guarantees human rights by protecting human beings against actions that interfere with their dignity and fundamental freedoms. It also obligates States Members of the United Nations to preserve and protect human rights without distinction of race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

A number of internationally agreed commitments to combat human trafficking for commercial sexual exploitation are legally binding for States parties, for example, the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, which includes measures designed to prevent human trafficking, protect victims and prosecute traffickers; and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, including their Optional Protocols. In addition, the Recommended Principles and Guidelines on Human Rights and Human Trafficking, an international “soft law” instrument developed by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, aim to promote and facilitate the integration of an appropriate human rights-based perspective into national, regional and international anti-trafficking interventions, policies and laws.

The international human rights-based approach is a “person-centred” framework that recognizes the right to remedy and prioritized prevention, assistance to victims and an appropriate response to perpetrators. An effective rights-based approach to trafficking for commercial sexual exploitation renders the human rights embedded in treaties into services on the ground.

The fifty-seventh session of the Commission on the Status of Women offers a unique opportunity for Member States to review progress on all of the promises that have been made to combat human trafficking for commercial sexual exploitation. We urge United Nations agencies and States parties to form strategic partnerships to bring an end to trafficking for commercial sexual exploitation as a human rights priority.

Recommendations

The NGO Committee to Stop Trafficking in Persons is dedicated to stopping human trafficking in all its forms. A forthcoming article by Yvonne Rafferty in the *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* documents the research for these recommendations. We recommend the following actions:

1. Combat demand

Trafficking for commercial sexual exploitation exists because of the global demand for vulnerable victims to exploit. A comprehensive tackling of demand

requires action at the following levels: (a) exploiters' demand (for example, brothel owners, pimps); (b) consumer demand (for example, clients or users of prostitutes); and (c) third parties and other intermediaries who profit directly or indirectly from commercial sexual exploitation (traffickers, recruiters, agents, transporters and corrupt officials in law enforcement, immigration and corrupt judicial systems that knowingly participate in the exploitation of persons through lax enforcement of laws against exploiters in the illegal sex trade). Traffickers and their accomplices are seldom investigated, prosecuted, convicted or punished. We urge Member States to take immediate action to:

(a) Strengthen legal frameworks through legislation and law enforcement (for example, ratify international instruments and adopt legislation in compliance with international obligations; enforce laws; prosecute traffickers and dismantle criminal networks perpetuating trafficking in persons);

(b) Intensify efforts to identify exploiters and facilitators (people whose money makes trafficking possible), including those in the private and corporate sectors.

2. Reduce supply

Girls and women trafficked for commercial sexual exploitation are often referred to as the "supply" side of human trafficking. Innovative policies and programmes are needed to empower girls and women with essential personal resources to enhance their competencies within high-risk settings. We urge Member States to take immediate action to:

(a) Promote competence and resilience through education and life skills. Education is the right of every girl and young woman and the key to transforming their life and the life of their community. Without education, girls are denied the opportunity to develop their full potential and play a productive and equal role in their families, societies, country and the world;

(b) Ensure safe migration. Knowledge and awareness are the first steps in enabling girls and young women to defend themselves. Providing them with information and resources on safe migration, how to find decent work, dangers to be aware of, whom to contact for help, and how to ensure that job offers abroad are safe and genuine are essential.

3. Strengthen communities

An effective, sustainable and rights-based solution to the complex problem of trafficking for commercial sexual exploitation requires Governments to create a safe, supportive and protective environment for all girls and women if they are to be protected against all forms of abuse, exploitation, neglect and violence and that their best interests are considered in all actions concerning them. We urge Member States to take immediate action to:

(a) Promote gender equality. Social norms and cultural traditions that perpetuate gender-based social inequalities, stereotypic attitudes and discrimination against girls and women perpetuate women's subordinate status in society, heighten the vulnerability of girls and pose a challenge to achieving gender equality. Because the trafficking of girls and women for commercial sexual exploitation is rooted in

gender politics, gender-based discrimination and patriarchal structures, there must be a strong commitment to changing prevailing attitudes and social norms;

(b) Implement national child-protection systems. The essential components of a national child-protection system consist of a range of options, including: strengthening education, health care, security and justice systems and structures; enhancing the capacity and accountability of those responsible for the child's primary care, including parents, guardians or others who have the care of the child; protecting children from adverse attitudes, traditions, customs, behaviours and practices; and having adequate laws and policies in place;

(c) Enhance economic opportunities. Poverty and economic inequality are significant risk factors associated with trafficking for commercial sexual exploitation. Most victims of human trafficking come from families in communities with inadequate economic and job opportunities. Promotion of the right to development and economic opportunities is vital to eradicating one of the root factors of trafficking for commercial sexual exploitation;

(d) Strengthen partnerships. An effective response requires effective coordination and communication between and among sectors and a sharing of resources both locally and across borders;

(e) Adequate training of law enforcement, border patrol and other frontline staff. Professionals working in government and non-government institutions and organizations are often not involved in cases of human trafficking because they do not have adequate information on the issues involved (for example, the types and modus operandi of the trafficking networks, the stereotyping of the victims or trafficking networks and the lack of knowledge regarding support resources and government and non-government assistance). As a result, the appropriate rights-based legal responses and the needed actions and interventions are overlooked;

(f) Promote girls' participation. The importance of girls' participation is a key component of human rights and is encouraged by the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Their contributions shift their position from beneficiaries to rights-holders with an ability to claim their rights. Girls who have experienced trafficking for commercial sexual exploitation are a valuable resource to those implementing preventive interventions and should be a primary source of information for base programmes and policies (for example, factors that make girls vulnerable, reasons for leaving home, special needs regarding prevention, assistance and protection).

4. Provide psychosocial rehabilitation and reintegration services for victims and survivors

Successful protection of persons trafficked for commercial sexual exploitation requires that we identify victims, assess their needs and provide them with appropriate psychosocial supports and services. Health and safety standards in exploitative settings are extremely low and the degree of violence experienced can range from coercive strategies, such as physical and verbal threats, to extreme physical abuse or torture-like violence. Owing to these harsh conditions and the trauma involved, girls and women trafficked for commercial sexual exploitation experience numerous adverse outcomes, including physical health problems (for

example, broken bones, burns, sexually transmitted infections, HIV/AIDS, complications from unwanted pregnancies and abortions) and mental health problems (e.g., hopelessness, despair, suicidal ideation and attempts, anxiety disorders, low self-esteem, depression and post-traumatic stress syndrome/disorder). These experiences and outcomes attest to the need for effective strategies to rehabilitate and reintegrate victims and survivors. We urge Member States to take immediate action to:

(a) Adopt a multidisciplinary service approach to recovery to ensure that victims receive effective psychosocial support during the rehabilitation and reintegration process;

(b) Provide resources for victims of violence and ensure that funding is never compromised;

(c) Identify and widely promote promising practices for providing services to victims.

5. Collect, analyse and disseminate data on trafficking for commercial sexual exploitation

Finding reliable statistics on the extent of human trafficking for commercial sexual exploitation is virtually impossible. Available data are elusive, confusing and unreliable in view of: (a) the clandestine nature of trafficking for commercial sexual exploitation; (b) the fact that it is a criminal activity and lawmakers and public officials find it difficult to acknowledge the magnitude of the problem; (c) uncoordinated data collection and statistics ridden with methodological problems making it hard to evaluate the validity and reliability of available data; and (d) the lack of precise, consistent, unambiguous and standard operating definitions of trafficking, trafficker, trafficked person and child. We urge Member States to take immediate action to:

(a) Adopt definitions of human trafficking that are consistent with the Trafficking in Persons Protocol;

(b) Institutionalize data collection that is disaggregated by sex, age, socioeconomic status, race and ethnicity;

(c) Monitor, evaluate and share information on effective programmes and policies.