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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 European Women’s Lobby, 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

European Women's Lobby, the largest umbrella organization of women's associations in the European Union, works to promote women's rights and equality between women and men. We very much welcome the fact that the elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls is the priority theme for the fifty-seventh session of the Commission on the Status of Women.

In a global context of economic and social crisis, in which women and girls are at greater risk of experiencing male violence, European Women's Lobby calls upon the Commission on the Status of Women to reiterate the global commitment to put an end to all forms of violence against women and girls. Women's organizations are expecting United Nations countries to listen to their voices and expertise and to agree on conclusions building on the existing international human rights instruments, while at the same time reinforcing commitments at all levels and providing concrete steps for further action.

Moreover, in a context in which women's rights are under attack at various levels owing to conservatism and antifeminist agendas, it is of crucial importance that United Nations Member States stand for the strongest vision of a global community free from violence against women. Following the failure of the Commission on the Status of Women to reach an agreement with regard to violence against women and girls in 2003 and in 2012, the United Nations and its Member States cannot afford another situation of compromising over women's human rights and must send a strong and clear sign that we will not achieve peace until we eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls.

Violence against women and girls is the most pervasive violation of women's human rights in Europe and worldwide

Violence against women and girls continues to affect the lives of millions of women and girls and is the most pervasive violation of women's human rights in Europe and worldwide. The persistence of male violence against women and girls in our societies strongly questions our vision of human security and peace: are we really longing for peace when half of the world's population is experiencing or might experience some form of violence just because they are female?

In Europe, 45 per cent of women have suffered from men's violence, and seven women die every day from male domestic violence. In addition, violence against women and girls remains invisible and underestimated as a structural phenomenon because of the lack of official data, both at the European Union level and in some European countries. This lack of knowledge leads to a lack of services protecting women and of activities aimed at preventing violence against women and girls. For example, only five European Union member States comply with the requirement of one place in a safe shelter per 7,500 inhabitants.

The impunity of perpetrators is also still high in Europe. Sexual violence, in particular, has one of the lowest conviction rates of any crime and high levels of attrition. Such impunity is even more prevalent when the victims are women with specific needs. Women with disabilities are four times more likely to experience sexual violence and face forced sterilization or abortion; many of them depend on the perpetrator for their daily care or even their survival. Migrant women are denied access to shelters, and undocumented women can face deportation when reporting

male violence. Worldwide, as many as one in four women experience physical and/or sexual violence during pregnancy, which increases the likelihood of having a miscarriage, stillbirth or abortion.

Urgency of comprehensive policies addressing all forms of violence against women and girls

Violence against women and girls has an impact on all society. The cost of domestic violence in the European Union is estimated at 16 billion euros per year, whereas the annual European Union member States' budgets for programmes to prevent male violence are 1,000 times less. In addition to the direct impact on individuals and the aggregate costs to society, violence against women and girls shapes women's and girls' place in society. At the same time, inequality between women and men creates the conditions for violence against women and girls and legitimizes it.

The recession and austerity measures have a negative impact on the prevalence of violence against women and girls and on their ability to escape the violence. Studies and reports show that the current economic context aggravates the unequal power relations between women and men and leads to an increase in domestic/intimate relationship violence, trafficking in women for sexual exploitation and a rise in prostitution and attacks on women affected by prostitution. It also has a direct impact on women, as their economic independence is undermined and service providers and public services face funding cuts and cannot therefore provide adequate quality services to women. Women's organizations in Europe struggle with financial survival: funding cuts reached up to 30 per cent in some countries. Non-governmental organization-led services to support women victims of violence are also threatened by the tendering and marketization of services, which leave behind and in isolation many women and girls affected by male violence.

The Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon, has acknowledged that the impact of globalization and of such policies as deregulation of economies and privatization of the public sector have tended to reinforce women's economic inequality, especially within marginalized communities. This is why the issue of violence against women and girls should be both addressed through a strong and consistent strategy and mainstreamed in all policy areas (such as economic, health and family policies), in order to make sure that those policies also contribute to ending violence against women and girls.

Building on international human rights agreements to ensure progress on women's rights

The United Nations and Member States have a duty to protect women and girls worldwide and cannot afford not to reaffirm their commitment to existing agreed language and instruments and to strong action against all forms of violence against women and girls. This issue cannot be left to national considerations or influenced by a profound and structural movement of antifeminist and conservative ideas. During the session of the Commission on the Status of Women in 2012, some countries and organizations contested the goal of equality between women and men, developing argumentation based on religion, tradition and culture to legitimize violations of women's rights and challenging universal human rights and the global solidarity for women's rights. Such backlash not only puts women's sexual and

reproductive rights under pressure in all parts of the world and tries to requalify the issue of violence against women and girls as a private issue but also directly questions women's participation to political, economic and social life in all countries.

European Women's Lobby would like to recall for the Commission on the Status of Women one of the most important international instruments, which should be at the core of the 2013 conclusions. General recommendation No. 19 of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women states that gender-based violence against women is violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately, and includes acts that inflict physical, mental or sexual harm or suffering, threats of such acts, coercion and other deprivations of liberty. The Beijing Platform for Action states that violence against women 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.

Such internationally agreed human rights instruments make it clear that violence against women and girls is a human rights violation, a cause and consequence of inequality between women and men and an obstacle to women's full participation in economic, social, political and cultural life and has an impact on all women and girls on this planet. In Europe, violence against women and girls is an obstacle to the European Union's goal of promoting equality between women and men. More importantly, violence against women and girls should be considered as a universal struggle that cannot tolerate any exception, justification or excuse.

We need strong Commission on the Status of Women conclusions demanding comprehensive strategies to end violence against women and girls now!

With its priority theme on violence against women and girls, the Commission on the Status of Women more specifically wants to address prevention and multisectoral services and responses to victims/survivors. European Women's Lobby acknowledges the importance of those two areas but would like to stress that any improvement in terms of both policies and attitudes should be part of a holistic and integrated strategy. An approach that includes policy, prosecution, prevention, protection, service provision and partnership is the only way to overcome violence against women and girls at all levels and should therefore be addressed in the 2013 conclusions of the Commission on the Status of Women.

Any action should materialize into a comprehensive policy framework building on the international human rights definitions of violence against women and girls. It should encompass legally binding instruments to ensure that all forms of violence against women and girls are addressed in all countries (prosecution) and to strengthen the protection of all women and girls; long-term awareness-raising activities and education programmes to foster prevention; and substantial and sustainable funding to support service providers and build partnerships with non-governmental organizations working towards a world free from male violence against women and girls.

At the level of the European Union, such requirement should materialize now, with the European Union taking three main steps: establishing 2015 as the European Year to End Violence against Women and Girls; ratifying the Council of Europe

Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence; and delivering a European Union strategy to end violence against women and girls, comprising legally binding instruments, awareness-raising activities and support to and collaboration with women's organizations and service providers. European Women's Lobby hopes to see the European Union take a strong stance at the session of the Commission on the Status of Women, speak in one voice to defend a progressive agenda to end violence against women and girls and lead the work towards the Commission's ambitious 2013 conclusions.
