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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 Education International, International Trade Union Confederation and Public Services International, 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.



Statement

Trade unions say: no compromise on women's rights; zero tolerance for violence against women and girls

In the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, violence against women is recognized as 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 the full advancement of women. Violence against women is one of the crucial social mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position in relation to men.

Violence against women exists in all countries and in all societies, and affects all groups of women and girls. One out of every three girls born today will face some form of violence in her lifetime. Violence against women and girls can be physical, sexual, psychological or economic. This shapes the reality of millions of women and girls who have no voice, no freedom, no economic independence and no equal access to education or work. Violence against women and girls happens in private and public places and in physical as well as virtual online spaces. Violence against women and the threat of it deprives women of their basic human rights.

Extreme forms of violence against women — which should be punished under criminal law in every single country — include:

- Female genital mutilation
- Forced marriage of young women and girls
- Rape, including rape as a weapon of war and ethnic cleansing.

Domestic violence is the most widespread form of violence against women. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, domestic violence is the main cause of female homicides worldwide. In Europe alone, 3,500 women are murdered by their intimate partners every year. Those figures are growing in several European Union countries, including Spain, Italy and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. A 2004 national study on femicide in South Africa estimated that a woman is killed by her intimate partner every six hours. In Latin America and in Canada, between 60 per cent and 70 per cent of all female homicides are perpetrated by an intimate partner.

Violence against women and girls is a significant threat to the economic independence of women and deeply affects their capacity to find and keep a job as well as their performance at work. As acknowledged in paragraph 112 of the Beijing Platform for Action, “Violence against women is an obstacle to the achievement of the objectives of equality, development and peace. Violence against women both violates and impairs or nullifies the enjoyment by women of their human rights and fundamental freedoms.”

Along with the physical and emotional suffering, the economic costs of violence against women are considerable and can amount to billions of dollars a year, owing to medical and health-care services or loss of productivity.

Violence against women and girls in schools and other educational settings, including those in remote rural areas, hinders students' educational, psychological and social development. Students who experience bullying, sexual harassment and

other forms of violence at school are more likely to be socially isolated, depressed and frustrated and to have little attachment to school than those who do not. When violence occurs in educational settings, it obstructs teaching, taints the working environment of teachers and affects students' quality of learning. Men and boys should be included in work on preventing violence, particularly in educational settings. A progressive understanding of masculinity is critical in such work with men and boys, especially as it is often expressed and acted out among and between peer groups in educational settings.

Violence against women and girls, or the threat of it, increases their risk of HIV infection. According to the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, women who experience violence are three times as likely to be infected with HIV as those who have not. Their subordination in marriages and intimate relationships greatly diminishes women's ability to negotiate condom use for safer sex or to refuse unsafe sex.

Currently, a number of politically conservative and fundamentalist religious forces from all denominations are seeking to limit gender equality or the realization of women's rights for "cultural", "traditional" or "religious" reasons. This form of culturally justified violence against women and girls relies on claims of cultural or religious authenticity and authority, and leads to the curtailment of women's fundamental right to control their own bodies and make their own life choices. Such claims must be rejected outright: there is no cultural or religious right to threaten, control, dominate, harm, torture or kill a woman because of her gender (see www.violenceisnotourculture.org).

Violence in the workplace

Violence against women in the workplace, whether sexual, physical, mental, psychological or economic, is a widespread phenomenon that affects millions of women and has a disproportionate impact on the following groups of vulnerable women:

- Women working in sectors that are not covered by labour laws, such as domestic workers, especially migrant domestic workers, who often find themselves at the mercy of their employers because of inadequate labour legislation
- Women working in export processing zones where workers' rights are limited
- Women working in areas of conflict or in countries in which male perpetrators of violence against women act with impunity
- Young women in precarious work situations, who are particularly vulnerable to sexual harassment and other forms of sexual violence.

The continued segregation of women in precarious, low-paid and low-status jobs and positions contributes to the problem. The current global crisis makes it even more difficult for women to find decent work. Privatization, structural readjustment and various "austerity" measures have entailed the loss of important public services and public service jobs. In many countries, these were "good" unionized jobs for women, with decent pay, benefits and pensions. Since there is a high concentration of women in public sector jobs, women are disproportionately affected, and they are doubly affected owing to their dependency on public services.

The crisis, which is also being used as an excuse to scale back workers' rights and eliminate jobs, weakens women's legal protections at work. Women are afraid to lose their source of income and are increasingly reluctant to denounce acts of violence in their workplace. This further perpetuates intolerable situations of violence at work. In addition, the overall cuts in public spending have negative impacts on the effectiveness of prevention measures and social services provided to victims of violence.

The realization of the universal human rights of women, their empowerment and their promotion to leadership positions are all crucial elements of an agenda aimed at eliminating violence against women and girls. Respect for and the promotion of women's civil and political, economic, social and cultural rights are conditions essential for ensuring women's autonomy and capacity to exit violent situations. Access to health care and social services, child care, education, housing, food and basic income security are inextricably linked to women's greater or lesser vulnerability to different manifestations of violence against them.

Trade unions in action

Together with other civil society partners, trade unions are developing, implementing and promoting strategies aimed at eliminating violence against women and girls.

The elimination of violence requires strong intervention from public authorities to design and implement appropriate prevention measures, to ensure legal protection and the prosecution of cases and to provide support and compensation for victims. However, civil society organizations have a strong role to play in the design and implementation of public actions aimed at eliminating violence against women and girls. As trade unions, we call on States to adequately fund and invest in quality public services that are accessible to women, particularly women who are victims of violence.

Trade unions:

- Identify and address the underlying inequalities and the abuse of power that lead to discrimination and violence
- Raise awareness of and mobilize against discrimination and violence
- Break the silence concerning violence in the workplace
- Make the prevention and elimination of acts of violence a topic of social dialogue
- Include measures to protect victims of domestic violence in collective agreements
- Help to create mechanisms for eliminating sexual harassment and other forms of violence in the workplace
- Lobby for legislative reform that will help prevent and remedy violence against women, ensure compliance with their social and economic rights and promote decent work.

Fifteen demands made to Member States

1. Ensure that gender equality is enshrined as a principle in national constitutions.
2. Put in place effective mechanisms for enforcing the law in close cooperation with civil society. Ensure effective legal sanctions that will discourage acts of violence.
3. Adopt comprehensive plans of action against violence against women and provide sufficient resources for the implementation of policy and the provision of adequately funded and accessible public services to help women who are victims of violence, including shelters, hotlines, housing, social services and child care.
4. Provide training to judicial authorities and the police to enable them to deal adequately with issues of violence against women and girls.
5. Facilitate women's access to the mechanisms of justice, including the provision of translation into different languages as required, free legal assistance and advocacy.
6. Take effective measures to ensure that the media respect and promote respect for women and girls.
7. Integrate the principle of gender equality into school curricula, including a focus on the prevention of violence.
8. Actively support women in leadership positions and work to achieve parity between men and women in all decision-making bodies.
9. Enact national legislation that recognizes gender-based violence as grounds for asylum and non-repatriation claims, and recognizes the specific vulnerabilities of certain groups of women, including migrant workers, women with disabilities and indigenous women.
10. Develop indicators on work-related violence, in order to compile and publish sex-disaggregated data on a regular basis and set up systems to measure and monitor progress towards agreed targets.
11. Enact effective legislation to protect women and girls against discrimination and violence.
12. Ratify the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women without reservation and implement its General Recommendation No. 19, on violence against women, as well as the Optional Protocol to the Convention:
 - States that have ratified the Convention with reservations should withdraw those reservations with immediate effect
 - States that have ratified the Convention without reservation but continually violate it should be held accountable for such violations
 - All States should closely monitor and evaluate the implementation of the Convention.
13. Ratify the Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference for Women, the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, the Vienna Declaration

and Programme of Action, the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Declaration and Programme of Action of the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance.

14. Ratify International Labour Organization (ILO) Conventions Nos. 111, on non-discrimination, 189, on domestic workers, and 182, on child labour, and implement ILO Recommendation No. 200, on HIV and AIDS.

15. Adopt and adhere to the international instruments that protect women's rights in armed conflicts: the Declaration on the Protection of Women and Children in Emergency and Armed Conflict, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security and the statement made by the representative of the International Committee of the Red Cross to the Third Committee of the General Assembly on 14 October 2009.

In order to demonstrate their commitment to addressing violence against women, Governments, in cooperation with civil society, must intensify action to eliminate gender-based discrimination from all spheres and achieve true equality between women and men.

Trade unions call upon all Member States to take all measures necessary to immediately and without further delay prevent and remedy violence against women and girls.
