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entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and
peace for the twenty-first century”

Statement submitted by Federation Europeenne des Centres de Recherche et d’Information sur le Sectarisme (FECRIS), 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.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

The year 2020 commemorates the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. We at the Federation Européenne des Centres de Recherche et d'Information sur le Sectarisme commend many of the real accomplishments for women's rights as expressed in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Since 1995, governments, civil society, and other stakeholders have worked to eliminate discrimination against women and girls and achieve equality in all areas of life, in public as well as private spaces. Discriminatory legislation is being removed and violence against women and girls and harmful practices are addressed.

We also believe that everyone has a responsibility to act, particularly governments as the primary duty bearers. We must address opportunities and give new impetus to women's empowerment and women's and girls' enjoyment of human rights. Women and other females in sects are in need of these very resources to access their rights. Many are left behind due to cults that do not make available resources that mainstream society would see as a real options. Totalistic and closed sect environments hinder through fear and guilt extremist mindsets that entrap females.

The Federation Européenne des Centres de Recherche et d'Information sur le Sectarisme also supports women's empowerment and advancement, including the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion, and belief, thus contributing to the moral, ethical, spiritual, and intellectual needs of women and men, individually or in community with others and thereby guaranteeing them the possibility of realizing their full potential in society and shaping their lives in accordance with their own aspirations. This is according to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, but many of the destructive extremist sects and terrorist groups view women and girls as lesser beings. Female human rights are violated through neglect or violence, whether physical or mental. Examples include sexual abuse of minor females through forced marriages and coercive rape, and the unwanted pregnancies with all the complications that follow cry for human rights protections. We at the Fédération Européenne des Centres de Recherche et d'Information sur le Sectarisme appreciate the efforts of the sixty-fourth session of the Commission on the Status of Women to address the need for assistance and legal protection of marginalized women's groups like female cults victims. Required reporting of these episodes is lacking and needs legally binding statutory authority to assist those in need.

It is also important to prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls. With relevant information, communication, and dialogue as a means to further the advancement and empowerment of women and girls, including the enhancement of their capacities to enjoy the benefits of equal access to these resources through international cooperation and implementation. We at Fédération Européenne des Centres de Recherche et d'Information sur le Sectarisme contribute our support of the sixty-fourth session of the Commission on the Status of Women towards achievable goals.

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action supports respect for international law, including humanitarian law, to protect women and girls; develop the fullest potential of women and girls of all ages; ensure their full and equal participation in building a better world for all; and enhance their role in the development process. No one left behind applies to female sect members of any age and our goals is to support the sixty-fourth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, where the common ground we share is abundantly clear.

Discrimination against women begins at the earliest stages of life and must therefore be addressed from then onwards. This is especially true of women and young females in destructive totalitarian cults or extremist groups. Induced cultic

poverty is the plight of too many females subjected to slave-like conditions with no autonomous property ownership or assets that mainstream society makes openly available. Many females in extremist sects have no choice but to take employment that lacks long-term job security or involves dangerous working conditions. Elderly female members lack a pension or even government social security for retirement.

Many women spend their working lives in destructive cults that collect vast amounts of female members' earnings without retirement income that is available to outside democratic societies. In many cases, cultic females do not contribute to retirement funds, whether government funded or in the private sector. It is important for the sixty-fourth session of the Commission on the Status of Women to consider remedies for this issue. Governments around the world will inherit destitute women's and other females' need for retirement assistance and support for declining health needs.

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action stated that mental disorders related to marginalization, powerlessness, and poverty, along with stress and being overworked are factors many women and even minors face due to workplace discrimination. We at the Federation Européenne des Centres de Recherche et d'Information sur le Sectarisme encounter the same characteristics with sect women and minor females and provide our assistance resources, like mental health, medical, clergy, and legal professionals. The common ground areas here are very noteworthy but we can network with the sixty-fourth session of the Commission on the Status of Women.

Another key area for the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action deserving new attention for women sect victims is to:

(1) ensure that all health services and workers conform to human rights and ethical, professional, and gender-sensitive standards in the delivery of women's health services aimed at ensuring responsible, voluntary, and informed consent

(2) encourage the development, implementation, and dissemination of codes of ethics guided by existing international codes as well as ethical principles that govern other health professionals. We also have observed that many female sect victims lack workable access to these benefits. Numerous cults avoid health assistance from outside of their closed insular organizations. The pyramid authoritarian leadership structure of cults avoid outside mainstream professional health assistance. Female sect members need education and awareness of their healthcare options and how to use them. Financial deprivation is a real factor and many cultic and extremist groups do not spend resources for health insurance for their members. Private sect member income does not get applied to health care in most cases. The required record keeping that healthcare services encounters sect leadership hostility and is avoided by numerous cult organizations.

In the arena of government action, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action suggests to enact and enforce legislation against the perpetrators of practices and acts of violence against women, such as female genital mutilation, female infanticide, and dowry-related violence, and give vigorous support to the efforts of non-governmental and community organizations to eliminate such practices.

Create or strengthen institutional mechanisms, so that women and girls can report acts of violence against them in a safe and confidential environment, free from the fear of penalties or retaliation, and file charges. These worthy efforts need ongoing support, especially for women and minor females entrapped in destructive sects.

Girls are often treated as inferior and are socialized to put themselves last, thus undermining their self-esteem. Discrimination and neglect in childhood can initiate a lifelong downward spiral of deprivation and exclusion from the social mainstream.

Initiatives should be taken to prepare girls to participate actively, effectively, and equally with boys at all levels of social, economic, political, and cultural leadership according to the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action. We support this positive action, where needed education with the efforts of the sixty-fourth session of the Commission on the Status of Women could accomplish real change for the better, including female sect recovery and healing.

While women are increasingly using the legal system to exercise their rights, in many countries, lack of awareness of the existence of these rights is an obstacle that prevents women from fully enjoying their human rights and attaining equality. Legal literacy programmes have been effective in helping women understand the link between their rights and other aspects of their lives. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action provided the foundation for ongoing female sect members to achieve some level of justice that is so critically needed.
