



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
3 November 2019

English only

Commission on the Status of Women

Sixty-fourth session

9–20 March 2020

Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”

Statement submitted by Coalition Against Trafficking in Women, 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 Coalition Against Trafficking in Women, a non-governmental organization working to end the trafficking and sexual exploitation of women and girls as a vital part of realizing gender equality, reaffirms the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action's message that violence against women is an obstacle to the achievement of equality, sustainable development, and peace. On the occasion of this 25-year review, we urge the Commission on the Status of Women to seriously address the trafficking and sexual exploitation of women and girls as forms of gender-based violence, encouraging Member States to implement laws, policies, and other measures to combat and prevent this global problem.

While some progress in the struggle to eliminate violence against women, including trafficking and sexual exploitation, has occurred since the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, gender equality remains an elusive goal that requires significant investment from Member States. It will continue to elude our societies if firmer strides are not made toward ending sexual violence, exploitation, and trafficking.

The majority of human trafficking victims are women and girls. While some are trafficked for the purposes of forced labour as domestic servants, in factories or in agricultural fields, most are exploited within the sex trade, particularly in prostitution. Human traffickers prey on the most vulnerable and marginalized: women and girls who are young; mostly of colour and from the global south; poor; homeless; and of low socio-economic class or caste who have already suffered sexual abuse and violence, often at a young age, some of whom are migrants or displaced because of armed conflict and who lack choices and alternatives to survive. Traffickers use victims' vulnerabilities to coerce, entice, deceive, and abuse their power over them to traffic women and girls into sexual exploitation and forced labour to satisfy the demand for prostitution and cheap or free labour for untold profits. Women and girls trafficked into the commercial sex trade suffer extreme violence and discrimination at the hands of traffickers and other exploiters, including sex buyers, while those trafficked for labour servitude are equally vulnerable to sexual violence and sexual exploitation.

Addressing sex trafficking and sexual exploitation, including root factors and vulnerabilities, runs across the 12 critical areas and cross-cutting scheme.

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action affirms, "the effective suppression of trafficking in women and girls for the sex trade is a matter of pressing international concern. Implementation of the Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others ... needs to be reviewed and strengthened." ... With the Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others, it is vital that Member States implement national laws and policies addressing trafficking for sexual exploitation that fully reflect other key international legal and human rights instruments, particularly the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women and the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially women and children. Governments must be particularly observant of article 3 of the Trafficking in Persons Protocol's definition of human trafficking and ensure that law, policy, and other measures recognize the distinct dimensions of sex trafficking and its disproportionate impact on women and girls.

The clear relationship between sex trafficking and its end goal, the sex trade, including prostitution, is acknowledged in all three conventions. The Trafficking in Persons Protocol, the Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of

the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others in 1949, and Article 6 of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women specifically mandate Member States to combat the exploitation of the prostitution of others. Under the Trafficking in Persons Protocol, governments have an obligation to strengthen legislative or other measures to discourage the demand that fosters all forms of exploitation leading to trafficking as part of its efforts to combat these human rights violations. This includes policies that will curtail demand for prostitution, which fuels the sex trade and consequently sex trafficking. Demand for prostitution is a key external root factor of trafficking and sexual exploitation so addressing this is an important step towards prevention.

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action's strategic objective D.3. reinforces the call to address trafficking and sexual exploitation as forms of gender-based violence with other actions. Member States must comprehensively, "... assist victims of violence due to prostitution and trafficking ... take appropriate measures to address the root factors, including external factors, that encourage trafficking in women and girls for prostitution and other forms of commercialized sex," and provide legal and social services to victims. Furthermore, strategic objective C.2. calls on governments to strengthen programmes promoting women's health by adopting preventative measures against any abuse, including sexual exploitation and trafficking.

The sex trade is a cause and consequence of gender-based violence and discrimination. Women and girls are constantly seen as disposable commodities in society and displayed as such by the media. This runs counter to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action's call to the media in strategic objective J.2. to refrain from exploiting women and girls as sexual objects and commodities. The sexualization and commodification of women and girls by the media directly undermines women's equality and human rights and hides the inequalities and vulnerabilities that put women and girls at risk for sexual violence and exploitation. The sex trade thrives on and perpetuates these degrading stereotypes and feeds off these very inequalities.

Viewing the sex trade as a legitimate employer hinders efforts to close global gender gaps in employment, including pay equity and discrimination, as strategic objective F.1. calls on governments to do. It also reinforces attitudes and practices perpetuating sexual harassment, a persistent obstacle for women in achieving economic independence. The harms the sex trade inflicts upon women and girls are in direct violation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and it can never be a source of legitimate employment for any woman. Rather than promoting women's empowerment, the sex trade embodies and perpetuates gender inequality. Instead of normalizing the sex trade, governments must adopt and adequately fund programs aimed at providing women and girls with necessary social services, access to education, and dignified employment opportunities.

The United Nations and its agencies, governments, and civil society must take action to prevent and eradicate all forms of violence and exploitation of all women and girls, including human trafficking. We call on all Member States to honour their commitments in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action by:

- Developing social and economic structures to combat harmful cultural practices that foster gender-based violence and discrimination and can lead to trafficking in women and girls.
- Eliminating economic practices and discriminatory policies, including poverty and discrimination based on race, national origin, ethnicity, or religion that render women and girls vulnerable to trafficking and sexual exploitation.

- Implementing educational curricula that promote gender equality, emphasizing the harms of gender stereotypes, sexual exploitation, sexual violence, and the objectification of women and girls.
- Developing and implementing safe migration programs and providing support to migrant populations.
- Promoting the adoption of policies that encourage transparent business practices, clean supply chains, and fair wages and working conditions for all employees.
- Ensuring equal and free access to education and the establishment of literacy programs for all women and girls.
- Adequately funding programs aimed at preventing violence against women and support services for victims and survivors of trafficking and sexual exploitation, including exit programs with financial assistance, education and job training, employment opportunities, housing, medical care, legal advocacy, residency permits, and language training.
- Promoting effective laws against trafficking, prostitution, and related forms of sexual exploitation, including provisions based on gender equality, penalizing the demand for prostitution (sex buyers) while solely decriminalizing women bought and sold in the sex trade.
- Rejecting government policies promoting prostitution, whether through legalization or decriminalization of the sex trade, in violation of international law.
- Rejecting the misleading term “sex work”, which normalizes the abuse and exploitation of prostitution and attempts to redefine the sex trade as a viable employer for impoverished and marginalized women.
- Ratifying and implementing the Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others, the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Trafficking in Persons Protocol, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.
