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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 Coordination française du lobby européen des femmes, 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

The Coordination française du lobby européen des femmes [French Coordinating Committee for the European Women's Lobby] reaffirms that equality between women and men is a principle that has been endowed with the status of a fundamental right. It applies to all the world's women. However, the biggest gap between promise and reality, between States' commitments and real life, is in the field of women's rights. Violence against women is a fundamental obstacle to the achievement of gender equality and a violation of women's human rights.

The organization takes a firm stand against prostitution, which, by commodifying the body, violates human rights and constitutes one of the pillars of gender inequality and violence against women.

The organization has for years lent its support to proposals made to national and international bodies to put an end to prostitution, which does violence to prostituted persons.

The organization is a signatory to, and adheres to the tenets of, the Brussels Call "Together for a Europe Free from Prostitution" issued at the behest of the European Women's Lobby.

Prostitution: a violation of human rights and international standards

Prostitution is a violation of the Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others, which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 2 December 1949, ratified by 82 States and signed by 50. The Convention states in its preamble that "prostitution and the accompanying evil of the traffic in persons for the purpose of prostitution are incompatible with the dignity and worth of the human person".

Prostitution also runs counter to the 1979 United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which calls upon States parties to take "all appropriate measures, including legislation, to suppress all forms of traffic in women and exploitation of prostitution of women".

Lastly, prostitution is incompatible with articles 3 and 5 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states that "everyone has the right to life, liberty, and security of person" and that "no one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment".

It is time Governments gave real effect to the international recommendations acceded to by their States.

Prostitution is violence against prostitutes, most of whom are women. That violence, which occurs everywhere in the world, is unacceptable and must be stopped.

The great majority of prostitutes are subject to violence of all kinds in the context of prostitution: physical assault, verbal, sexual and psychological abuse, threats, etc.

Prostitution is itself a form of violence against sex workers: the repetition of unwanted sexual acts, which they must engage in for money or out of inequality and insecurity, itself constitutes sexual violence and so is unacceptable.

Prostitution feeds and perpetuates human trafficking for sexual exploitation. It is a form of violence that has a clear international dimension. To put an end to it,

national responses are necessary but insufficient; global, international thinking is essential.

The organization makes the following recommendations to put an end to the violence of prostitution:

National laws on prostitution must penalize the client, not the prostitute, and must remove all provisions that criminalize prostitutes.

It is essential to combat procuring and human trafficking by means of ambitious international policies and through harmonization of national legislation to effect abolition.

In addition to prevention policies, there is a need for reintegration policies for prostituted persons, to enable them to quit prostitution.

Training programmes are also needed for police officers, judges and social workers, so that they can support and listen to prostitutes and receive and report their complaints.

Finally, Governments must not fail to develop education policies on equality and sexuality. Governments should devise programmes to impress upon all stakeholders (parents, teachers, guidance counsellors) the equality of girls and boys throughout their schooling, at all levels of the education system, to effect a change in the stereotypical images of the social roles of men and women. It is also urgent to develop sex education for a secular, egalitarian society, taking a good citizenship approach: recognize the sexuality of all young people, conceive of sex education as part of a comprehensive approach to sexuality focusing on social gender relationships, equality, awareness of all sexualities, the fight against sexism and homophobia, lesbophobia and transphobia, violence prevention and the prevention of sexual risk.

The organization also wishes to draw attention to the alarming situation of Roma girls and teenagers in Europe and the violence they often suffer. The organization urges the Governments of European countries to make every effort to give Roma girls and teenagers access to education, noting that school is the only stable environment where these girls can forge links outside their community and keep from drifting into street activities: begging, black market work, delinquency or prostitution.