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Statement submitted by World Society of Victimology, 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

Violence against women is a prevalent crime throughout the world. Violence against women is a breach of human rights. It knows no socioeconomic, cultural, religious, age, geographical or other boundaries. Women are often negatively impacted by economic and social disadvantage. In some places they are denied a basic education. They are too frequently the victims of crimes against humanity, especially in countries affected by armed conflict. Women are overrepresented as victims of domestic violence, indigenous family violence, and sexual assault and sexual harassment. They are maimed, disfigured and even killed unnecessarily to protect the so-called honour of others, men in particular. Women are also more likely to be victims of human trafficking resulting in sexual servitude and/or labour exploitation. They also suffer workplace violence and endure violence in prostitution as well as when legally employed as sex-workers. Women in prisons, detention centres and other institutions are also victims of violence. Violence against women is one of the most pervasive forms of victimization in the world, which has attracted deservedly much attention (although that attention has been skewed towards domestic and sexual violence so gaps remain in our knowledge and crucially in our responses to other violence).

Both victimization in general and victimization of women in particular are areas of interest in victimology. Victimology is the scientific study of victimization, including (but not limited to) the relationships between women as victims of violence and men as perpetrators; the effects of that violence on women; interactions between women victims and the criminal justice system (namely police, prosecutors, courts and corrections); and the efficacy of victim assistance and care. Victimology also covers the prevention of victimization, such as research preventing violence against women. In criminal victimology, women are identifiable people who have suffered harm directly and indirectly by perpetrators who, in accordance with official crime statistics, are most often men. Despite the victimological interest, victimology as a unique discipline remains controversial to some feminist commentators. Much of that controversy can be traced to early victimological studies that fuelled the concept of victim-blaming. Although it is not the purpose of the present statement to deconstruct the controversy, it is important to point out that too many people, both male and female, in developed countries when asked about sexual assault on women believe that some victims “ask for it”. Thus, there is a proportion of the population that still attributes blame for sexual violence to women. Similarly, some people still believe that violence against women in the sanctity of the home (or family) is a private matter. Conversely, research and advocacy (both areas in which members of the World Society of Victimology have been actively engaged) have combined across the world to draw attention to violence against women.

The World Society of Victimology unambiguously states that violence (in any form) against women is wrong. It notes that violence against women carries enormous economic and social costs to society. Hence, in contrast to the notion of victim-blaming, the World Society of Victimology promotes a set of core (and indisputable) values:

- All violence against women is unacceptable.
- All women have the right to be free from violence and fear of violence.

- Violence against women denies their dignity and stymies their fundamental rights to freedom and justice.
- The World Society of Victimology asserts that the perpetrators of violence against women must be called to account for their violence and perpetrators should not be permitted to escape responsibility for their use of violence.

The World Society of Victimology acknowledges the obvious connection between economic development and crime, including violence against women, and that poverty, underdevelopment and lack of opportunities have much to do with the social and economic inequities endured by women in societies.

In promoting the Millennium Development Goals, the World Society of Victimology sees direct, albeit complex, connections between development and the effects of crime, and/or between the substantive and technical work of various international institutions and sustainable development. The United Nations has a key role in improving the international community's coordinated efforts to address violence against women but also the adverse impact of such violence on development. Violence prevention should be integrated into development initiatives.

The World Society of Victimology encourages United Nations agencies to take greater advantage of the expertise and implementing capabilities available among non-governmental organizations and their capacities to assist women and children in need, especially as victims/survivors. The Society urges greater involvement of non-governmental organizations because there is a great deal of wisdom and practical experience residing among committed individuals and institutions. The World Society of Victimology in addition believes that together we can promote the rule of law at the international, national and local levels, and genuinely improve practical outcomes for women and their children.

The World Society of Victimology also holds that the rights of women as victims are not pious platitudes but rather mandatory guidelines for action. In particular in the context of promoting sustainable development, which is prominent on the international agenda, the World Society of Victimology calls upon all States to adopt and implement appropriate legislation, policies and practices for giving them a voice, and protecting and assisting them. Not only would justice then be realized for women, their children and for their communities, but healed and integrated victims/survivors would then be fully engaged as equal partners in sustainable development and become part of the solution rather than the chronic, though often silent, problem. Specifically, we call for the establishment of an expert group comprising Governments, expert non-governmental organizations and victims, to study specific implementation of the Declaration of Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime and Abuse of Power.

The World Society of Victimology maintains that the elimination of violence against women is a universal challenge that requires strong leadership and commitment from within Governments, civil society, the faith community and the public. The Society also calls upon States to develop and implement crime prevention (including anti-violence) measures according to General Assembly resolution 65/228 and to integrate crime prevention strategies to advance justice, equity and the possibility of achieving sustainable development.

Furthermore, many States have endorsed the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and their leaders have pledged to act

in accordance with the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993). Those committed to these instruments are obliged to exercise “due diligence” to prevent violence against women; to provide services to victims/survivors of abuse; and to ensure that perpetrators are brought to justice.

The World Society of Victimology acknowledges that the interests of women as victims have been the bedrock of reform in law, policy and procedure but the Society also points out that much more must be done. In too many societies, violence against women remains widespread, and systemically and culturally entrenched. The World Society of Victimology urges a zero-tolerance to such violence.

Concrete steps are necessary (among other outcomes) to cultivate the sociocultural and sociopolitical changes that are necessary to curb violence against women. The responsibilities for tackling violence against women and other issues that negatively impact women such as education, decent employment, health and welfare, housing, access to justice and protection for their children, do not rest with one sector in our communities. If women are to be safe, and violence against them as well as other forms of victimization reduced, it is vital that every part of the system works together.

Although it is important to identify where States are failing to meet their obligations to counter violence against women, the World Society of Victimology points out that there are many examples of international good practices. Such good practices are known in structural reform; and in the context of prevention (including raising awareness, providing protection and enhancing safety), prosecution (including addressing the causes of revictimization); and the provision of assistance (including practical aid, financial assistance and treatment). Good practices should be implemented with a sense of urgency but also mindful that it would be inappropriate to ignore the political, social, economic and technological structures in any particular national context.

Violence prevents women and their children from enjoying life as equal citizens. The World Society of Victimology and its partners (such as the International Victimology Institutes of Tilburg University, the Netherlands and Tokiwa University, Japan) acknowledge that the effects of, and responses to, violence against women cover a wide range of issues, including health, housing and employment, all of which are prominent in the dialogue on the Millennium Development Goals. The Society believes violence against women is a human rights issue and thus should be tackled in a human rights framework.