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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 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

Challenges and achievements in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls: a victimology perspective

The scope of victimology is blurred. Some say it is the study of victims of crime; for others it is the study of victims of human rights violations; and for still others it is the study of victims of everything. The notion common to all interpretations is that victimology is the scientific study of victims, the extent, nature and causes of victimization and its consequences for the persons affected, as well as the study of the reactions to and treatment of victims.

Victimology conceivably spans the plight of individuals and collectives of people who suffer deprivation, disadvantage, loss or injury due to any natural and/or human cause. Natural causes of victimization include disease, predatory animals and natural disasters. Human causes of victimization include the unlawful acts or omissions of people, individually or collectively. Structural victimization, such as patriarchy and colonization, is also a human cause of victimization. In this context, victimization mirrors the social, political, economic and technological structures in society. These structures often disadvantage women and girls.

Throughout the world, women and girls bear the brunt of economic difficulties and social barriers and restrictions. Further, there are social, political and economic penalties that accrue to the status of being a woman or girl. Women and girls also still suffer from discrimination and oppression, for no reason other than their gender. Blatantly prejudiced views impede their access to and participation in education, training, employment and decent work; indeed, such views impact all facets of the lives of women and girls.

Although women and girls are too often victims, many fortunately are also survivors. The World Society of Victimology pays tribute to the courage and tenacity of many women and girls who, often at tremendous personal cost, engage in political and social activism to improve practical outcomes for others. Women's leadership is critical.

On the occasion of the fifty-eighth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, we urge everyone to look at the world through the eyes of victims, with a particular focus on the plight of women and girls, upon which the themes listed below shed light. In addition, we maintain that little can be achieved by waging an exclusively women/girls versus men/boys confrontation. Such an approach runs the risk of alienating men and boys who instead should be partners in the solutions.

Poverty

It is estimated that 1.3 billion people live in extreme poverty, and nearly all those people live in the developing world. Moreover, over two thirds are women who, it is said, experience poverty more acutely than men. The so-called "war on poverty" has been characterized by a retreat from the welfare State, which has had the effect of excluding millions of poor women from receiving a variety of State subsidies. Many have become worse off as a result of "economic restructuring". Many women struggle to provide basic needs, such as food, water, clothing and shelter, for their families and themselves. Many women and girls do not have access to education and health care. For many women and girls the disadvantage has

resulted in a loss of the integrity and dignity of the self. Many deprived women and girls are forced into prostitution and/or become addicted to drugs. Feelings of despair and helplessness weigh heavily on the lives of many women, giving rise to suicidal thoughts and, for many, suicide.

Unemployment and underemployment

Unemployment in many places is a persistent problem, exacerbated by the economic crisis. Women often outnumber men in the lowest-paid and most menial jobs, and women make up a large proportion of the flexible and semi-skilled, casual workforce whose jobs have been and continue to be the first to disappear. Tackling unemployment is not just about providing employment opportunities; rather, decent work must be at the core of economic policy and sustainable development. Decent work is not just about the level of employment, but also about better jobs. Furthermore, decent work requires that workplace inequalities be addressed.

Labour exploitation

Labour exploitation is the opposite of decent work and a serious criminal offence. Such exploitation causes untold human suffering and steals from its victims. Impoverished victims are often lured into this modern form of slavery with false promises of decent work, including good working conditions and fair pay. However, victims often end up working against their will in unregulated workplaces and are not paid. Despite the risks involved, some victims — women in particular — are motivated to become associated with traffickers because of their desperate economic circumstances, such as poverty, underdevelopment and the lack of decent work.

Organized crime

Organized crime discourages legitimate livelihoods, fosters mistrust among citizens and businesses, impedes economic growth and stimulates corruption. Organized crime relies, among other factors, on unethical, fraudulent and criminal practices in the upper echelons of business and Government. Organized crime spawns corruption, making it increasingly difficult for women and girls to survive, among other impacts. Organized crime and corruption, with their many vectors and whether they happen in prosperous or developing countries, impede the social and economic development of communities and States, as well as the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

Violence

Violence harms individuals and destabilizes communities. Rarely, however, are the myriad costs of crime fully assessed. Most studies highlight expenditure on criminal justice, private security and the direct costs of violence and other crime. Fewer studies highlight the intangible costs, such as the monetary value of lost quality of life and lost productivity, as well as loss of paid work. Violence against women is said to be any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life. In too many places, such violence contributes significantly to unsafe and unequal societies, as well as undermines efforts to reach all the Millennium Development Goals.

Femicide

The murder of women and girls by males merely because they are female is despicable. That the killers operate in some places with impunity is abhorrent. Femicide is distinguished from homicide in general by several characteristics, including a victim-perpetrator (victimizer) relationship and a history of violence by the victimizer towards the victim or other women. In some nations, the victims share common characteristics, such as often being young women in impoverished circumstances who work in factories, in the informal economy, or are students. Victimizers are often motivated, directly or indirectly, by misogynist and sexist ideas. World leaders should direct their energies to eradicating such ideas and the consequent victimization.

Armed conflict

In places where armed conflict prevails, women and girls are taken as hostages, forcibly displaced, systematically raped, forced into sexual slavery, and trafficked for sexual and economic purposes. Much of the violence strips women of their dignity and fundamental rights. Despite the prevalence of such violations of the human rights of women and girls in situations of armed conflict, few perpetrators are ever held accountable. Women should not have to shoulder the burden of liberating other women and girls from the terror and effects of armed conflict.

Concluding comments

The Millennium Development Goals are eight key objectives related to sustainable and humane development that also tackle profound social problems. The Goals variously address women's and girls' experiences with poverty, unemployment, lack of education and so on. The Millennium Development Goals seek to: promote gender equality and empower women, achieve universal primary education, reduce child mortality, improve maternal health and alleviate poor health. Other Millennium Development Goals contain provisions pertinent to women and girls, for example, eradicating poverty in a manner that is mindful of women's and girls' unique experiences. All efforts to attain the Millennium Development Goals should underscore the fact that women's rights are human rights.

The provision of decent work for women is a prime example. Decent work is a necessary means to secure fundamental needs, such as shelter, food and security; therefore, it is a route out of poverty. It is also an integral element in helping people cope and attain their personal aspirations. Creating employment and upgrading the skills of a workforce require dismantling the obstacles to women's participation in the labour force, such as lack of training, skills, access and opportunities. Workers' rights are crucial in the battle against forced labour, child labour, discrimination and the exploitation of women at work. Social protection means income security, so women must be enabled to make choices and take control of their lives. Social dialogue means giving women a true and free voice that is listened to and acted upon.

The Millennium Development Goals are not pious platitudes but rather mandatory guidelines for action. The World Society of Victimology condemns empty promises and urges everyone to act in accordance with their commitments to the Goals. In so doing, women must be involved so that they can realize their desires, make their choices and play their role as equals, everywhere.