

Agenda Item 8: World crimes trends and emerging issues and responses in the field of crime prevention and criminal justice.

This statement is made on behalf of Soroptimist International and Zonta International.

Worldwide, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought with it an increase in crimes against women and girls. Rising rates of domestic and intimate partner violence are well documented. Additionally, through Soroptimist International's project work across 122 countries, and the project work of Zonta International, we are seeing a re-emergence of harmful traditional practices, including child, early and forced marriage, already crimes in many countries. That these marriages are still legal anywhere is unacceptable. All countries should criminalise these practices, close legal loopholes, and provide support to communities to help change these harmful practices.

Where communities are experiencing an increase in child, early and forced marriage, the causes are often increasing poverty, unemployment, food insecurity, lack of education opportunities, and uncertainty about the future. After disasters, displacement or conflict, rates of child, early and forced marriage increase because parents do not know what alternatives are available. While criminalisation is a critical tool in addressing child, early and forced marriage, it is not a complete solution. To eradicate this practice, socio-economic programmes, including those conducted by CSOs, must be supported and funded to provide alternatives to child, early and forced marriage and to empower communities and families to change these practices.

Child, early and forced marriage can involve human trafficking, including internally within countries, female genital mutilation, and bridal kidnapping. It can also link to "marry-your-rapist" laws. Twenty countries have these laws, allowing perpetrators to escape justice if they marry the victim. Even where laws do not formally permit this, some communities recognise this practice as a legitimate way to initiate a marriage. Women's and girls' lives and rights must not be bargained away via cultural or legal constructs. We must not move backwards from the progress that's been made to address gender-based crimes worldwide.

Thank you for the opportunity to make this statement.