



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
4 May 2022

English only

Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice

Thirty-first session

Vienna, 16–20 May 2022

Item 6 (d) of the provisional agenda*

**Integration and coordination of efforts by the
United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and by
Member States in the field of crime prevention and
criminal justice: other crime prevention and
criminal justice matters**

Statement submitted by Soroptimist International, a non-governmental organization in general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council**

The Secretary-General has received the following paper, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/CN.15/2022/1.

** Issued without formal editing.



Addressing The Impacts of Conflict and Trafficking Upon Women and Girls

Soroptimist International and the organizations co-sponsoring this statement are concerned about the impacts of conflict and trafficking upon women and girls, and how those impacts have been enhanced by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Women and children, especially girls, have been exposed and left vulnerable to an intensified environment of violence, displacement and forced homelessness. Fleeing their homes, they are unable to access education, health services and economic opportunities. These realities are pushing gender equality backwards and can put women and girls at risk of criminally organized groups seeking to exploit them at a time when they are desperate.

Pre-existing patterns of discrimination against women and girls place them at increased risk of sexual, physical, psychological, and other forms of violence. While some of these are criminal actions, not all are. Immediate action must be taken to review existing laws and create new laws to combat gender-based violence and to ensure full accountability. This must happen both at the national and international levels. All justice systems must include fully resourced support to women and girls, providing them with safe spaces to live, ways to give evidence, security after investigations, and sentencing and compensation which reflect the impacts of the crimes they experience.

Crimes Committed During Conflict

Violence happens in a continuum and the division between violence in peacetime and violence during conflict is often artificial. The Committee on Elimination of Discrimination against Women recognized in General Recommendation 19, that, “Wars, armed conflicts and the occupation of territories often lead to increased prostitution, trafficking in women and sexual assault of women, which require specific protective and punitive measures”. Recent evidence from current conflict zones indicates that all forms of sexual violence are prevalent. These include rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, trafficking in persons and kidnapping. All continue to disproportionately affect women and girls in all their multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination.

Existing mechanisms that address these crimes must be better used, including multilateral sanctions, reparations, and international criminal investigations, judicial training, and support. Additionally, there must be improved funding for health and social support services that help to protect and rehabilitate affected women and girls. During conflict, health services, including sexual and reproductive services, are either minimal, difficult to access or non-existent. This leaves women and girls vulnerable to exploitation.

As well as crimes that specifically target women and girls, practices that indiscriminately target civilians, and are therefore a violation of international humanitarian law, are also being practiced. The use of mines, flechettes, anti-personnel weapons and starvation as a weapon of war has been seen in conflict zones across the world. In some cases, particularly where women and girls are responsible for gathering water, firewood, and food, their lives and health are put at particular risk by the use of these illegal practices. States and non-state actors must not be allowed to continue these practices with impunity. Even where treaties have not been ratified, these weapons of war violate international customary law. In such cases, we encourage countries to be bold and to use universal jurisdiction to prosecute those responsible for these actions.

Trafficking

As thousands of women and girls are forced from their homes by conflict or disasters, organized crime has been quick to capitalize on this, viewing such situations as opportunities. With there being known connections between displacement, unsafe

migration, and trafficking in persons, it is vital that all those who are displaced, refugees, asylum seekers or are on the move are protected to prevent exploitation. Pervasive challenges such as high and increasing levels of economic insecurity, persistent poverty, and inequality have all been exacerbated by COVID-19. The pandemic has exposed the vulnerability of billions of people, with families and businesses struggling while organized crime has preyed on people's fears, defrauded them, and has taken advantage of vulnerable women and girls as economic reality bites.

Human traffickers have targeted the growing number of people migrating from worsening political, social, and economic environments. They are increasingly targeting people through social media platforms to make their approaches more convincing as they fraudulently impersonate trusted organizations. Despite the progress made, there are still many challenges in preventing women and girls being trafficked especially in current unstable geographical regions. Further action must be taken to establish and implement legislation appropriate to countering this criminal activity. Support must include financial resources to ensure accurate and reliable disaggregated data is collected and monitored by gender, sex, age, nationality, race, ethnicity, disability, income, migratory status, and geographic location as a minimum. This would provide accurate evidence for monitoring all aspects of the trafficking of women and girls which would enable this international criminal activity to be eliminated.

Recommendations

We call on all member states to:

- Fully implement the Kyoto Declaration on advancing crime prevention, criminal justice and the rule of law: towards the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development particularly paragraph 27 on Mainstreaming a gender perspective into crime prevention.
- Ratify CEDAW, remove all reservations and implement General Recommendations to protect women and girls from unlawful activity especially taking note of GR19.
- Ratify Convention 190 on eliminating violence in the workplace as an ILO member state.
- Support an international treaty on all forms of violence against women and girls, and expedite its negotiation and agreement.
- Sign and ratify the Palermo Protocol and develop plans for the swift implementation of its provisions if they have not already done so.
- Ensure that international laws are adhered to, recognizing there should be no impunity for perpetrators of war crimes and crimes against humanity, especially those perpetrated against women and girls.
- Make special efforts to identify human trafficking and exploitation, recognizing the heightened vulnerability of women and girl migrants moving from countries of origin, transit, and destination. Border guards, police and other authorities at borders should be trained appropriately. NGOs should be permitted to assist and provide services to victims.
- Develop safe migration routes with immediate effect, particularly for regions affected by disasters and conflict.
- Increase efforts to collect and monitor disaggregated data especially in relation to all forms of gender-based violence and human trafficking.
- Ensure that all appropriate measures are used to assure that trafficking victims and victims of modern day slavery shall be treated as victims of crime and not as criminals, and humanitarian and compassionate factors are considered when dealing with victims of human trafficking.

- Maintain and develop international co-operation to protect and prevent women and girls becoming victim to all forms of sexual violence.
- Condemn and counteract all forms of violence against women and girls placed in vulnerable situations by environmental or human created disasters

Continued persecution, insufficient support and services, and low prosecution rates often prevents women and girls from coming forward to seek assistance in the justice system. Indeed, for many, speaking up may result in more abuse and violence. Systems and cultures of impunity mean that women and girls are disproportionately affected by crime, including human trafficking and in conflict situations. Women and girls are also further disadvantaged and marginalized by the lack of access to information and education about their human rights. Efforts to achieve gender equality and eliminate these crimes must be done in conjunction given the interlinkages.

Co-sponsoring ECOSOC NGOs:

Graduate Women International
International Alliance of Women
International Association of Democratic Lawyers
International Council of Psychology
International Council of Women
National Alliance of Women's Organizations-UK
NGO Committee on Aging-Vienna
Pan Pacific & Southeast Asia Women's Association International
Servas International
United Methodist Church-General Board of Church and Society
Women's International Zionist Organization
