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Statement submitted by Franciscans International, 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.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Franciscans International welcomes the opportunity to submit this statement to CSW65, on the theme of “Women’s full and effective participation and decision-making in public life, as well as the elimination of violence, for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls.”

While our statement focuses on examples from the Asia-Pacific region, including the States of Solomon Islands, Philippines, and Indonesia, we note that our partners throughout the world have underscored similar patterns of violence against women, including violence and abuses in the private sphere, as well as that linked to public life, ranging from government actions to those tied to extractives and other industries. Such violence is often part of a broader system of inequality that limits women’s full and effective participation in public life.

Violence against Women

Franciscans International notes the increase in domestic violence since the start of the pandemic globally, leading the UN Secretary General to call for a global ceasefire to violence to extend to the domestic sphere. This increase is especially worrying in countries where domestic violence was already relatively prevalent, and there is little accountability. The UN has reported rates of 37 per cent, 40 per cent, and 68 per cent of women in South Asia, South-East Asia, and the Pacific, respectively, who have been subject to violence by intimate partners.

For example, in the provinces of Papua and West Papua of Indonesia, few cases of domestic violence are reported to authorities, in part due to shame, fear of stigma, concerns about confidentiality, and lack of confidence in the justice system. Indeed, few reported cases result in prosecution.

Since the start of the pandemic, the Jakarta Legal Aid Foundation has reported a “tripling of reported cases after the lockdown began in March” in Indonesia.

Indigenous Papuan women, alongside the general population, also face violence and threats by Indonesian security services. Franciscans International’s partner, the International Coalition for Papua, has noted “a significant increase in threats, and obstruction or intimidation against human rights defenders,” alongside a high number of extrajudicial killings.

Similarly, State violence in the Philippines continues to target the civilian population as a whole, and human rights defenders in particular. We note that the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights has “verified the killings of 208 human rights defenders, journalists and trade unionists, including 30 women, between January 2015 and December 2019.” The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has further noted an environment of incitement which has “ranged from degrading and sexually charged comments against women human rights defenders, politicians and combatants – including rape jokes” – to statements making light of torture, [...]”

We also draw attention to violence against women in the context of extractive industries. Franciscans International recently worked with partners in the Solomon Islands to identify the various impacts of the logging sector there.

Partners noted violence against women, including sex trafficking and sexual exploitation of women, surrounding logging operations. In 2013, the then-Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, Rashida Manjoo, noted “allegations of incest, gang rape and sexual exploitation by foreign workers in the logging and fishing industries. The increasing influx into poor and isolated communities of men who are employed by logging and fishing companies

and who have access to money, and other goods that are inaccessible to locals, has created a “market” for sexual services, and has also resulted in cases of sexual exploitation and abuse.”

Over 7 years later, such abuses continue. In one interview recently conducted by a partner, one mother shared her concern over her daughter’s well-being: “there is security on the log pond, but they don’t pay attention to the girls who are roaming around or walking to the logging camp. They are paid to protect the machines, so that is what they do, but nobody protects our girls.”

Participation in Public Life

In the context of Solomon Islands, we underscore the likely connection between violence against women arising from the logging sector, and the lack of consultation and involvement of women in all phases of logging operations, including in hearings related to land titles.

The domination of logging and other forms of commercial negotiations by men has marginalized women in land issues, even in areas where matrilineal ownership is practiced, such as in Guadalcanal Island. The Tamboko communities adjacent to the logging operation said that women were not consulted regarding the possible mitigation plan on the adverse impact of logging on their livelihood.

In an interview conducted by a partner, one female respondent noted, “We have been neglected in the decision-making process.” The impacts of excluding women from such processes have been previously noted by the World Bank, who reported, land deals “rarely reflect women’s land use, including for livelihoods and for child nutrition,” and land disputes lead to increased conflict and other negative impacts borne disproportionately by women.

In moving to Indonesia, and the provinces of Papua and West Papua, we note that women’s participation in politics and administration is below the statutory quota (of 30 per cent). For the term of 2019–2024, there were only seven women out of a total of 45 elected officials (i.e. only 15.5 per cent of the total). Only three of these seven women are indigenous. The International Coalition for Papua has more broadly noted, “[I]t is still very rare for women to be promoted into leading positions in the local government.”

The Covid pandemic has highlighted inequalities and disparities amongst various segments of the population globally; the UN has noted that impacts from the pandemic have been “exacerbated for women and girls simply by virtue of their sex” across all spheres. Partners across Asia-Pacific countries, and indeed globally, have underscored these impacts.

As the UN and its member States repeat the aim of “building back better,” Franciscans International underscores that this must include women in central roles in decision-making processes, and full and effective participation in public life more broadly. This must include structural changes where women have full access to justice, with accountability measures for all types of violence against women, ranging from the public to the private sphere.