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**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and
to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly
entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and
peace for the twenty-first century”****Statement submitted by [Coordination des Associations et
des Particuliers pour la Liberté de Conscience], 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.

From access to justice to economic empowerment: ending institutional violence
against women and girls

The Coordination of Associations and Individuals for Freedom of Conscience, a
nongovernmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and
Social Council, submits the present written statement to the seventy first session of the
Commission on the Status of Women.

The priority theme of the seventy first session calls for accelerating the
achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the
context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Equality before the law and
effective access to justice are the gateway to every other right. Yet in many countries,
including States that present themselves as champions of gender equality, women who
report violence encounter a second form of violence inflicted by the very institutions that
should protect them. The organization wishes to draw the attention of the Commission to
institutional violence against women and girls, with a focus on the situation in France,
and to the economic consequences of this violence, which directly undermine both the
priority theme and the cross cutting issue of poverty and the economic empowerment of
women.

INSTITUTIONAL VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN WHO REPORT
INTRAFAMILIAL VIOLENCE

Institutional violence refers to harm perpetrated not by private actors but by judicial, social and child protection services in their response to reported violence. Documented patterns show that cases involving mothers and children are frequently diverted from criminal justice pathways to civil, administrative or child protection frameworks without an effective investigation of the initial violence. The violence is requalified as parental conflict or educational difficulty, and the assessment centers on the behavior of the mother rather than on the acts of the perpetrator, transforming a victim or protective parent into a subject to be evaluated and controlled.

Mothers who refuse to hand over a child to a parent accused of violence are routinely prosecuted under the offence of failing to surrender a child, often before any full risk assessment. They are placed in a double bind, forced to choose between obeying a judicial order and ensuring the immediate safety of their children, under threat of penal sanctions or loss of custody. This constitutes a form of institutional coercive control. Allegations are redirected from the accused perpetrator toward the protective mother, who may be labeled as manipulative or accused of so called parental alienation, a concept criticized by international bodies for lacking scientific validation. Psychological and psychiatric expert assessments frequently pathologize trauma reactions such as hypervigilance, which are misread as signs of disorder, thereby disqualifying the testimony of the mother and neutralizing her alerts. The disclosures of children are minimized or reinterpreted, prolonging their exposure to risk and causing documented psychological harm. The systemic disqualification of protective mothers also produces a profound deterrent effect, discouraging victims and professionals from reporting violence at all.

THE FRENCH CASE: A DOCUMENTED PATTERN

France has ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. It has therefore committed, in binding terms, to prevent violence against women, to protect victims and to guarantee them effective access to justice.

The analysis conducted by the organization, based on institutional data, oversight reports, national statistics, jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights and established international standards, concludes that the practices described above are not isolated malfunctions but recurrent patterns within the French sociojudicial system. Disproportionate numbers of child placement decisions affect mothers who have reported violence, and penal proceedings are initiated against mothers whose only act was to protect their children. Public debate since the mass testimonies gathered under the hashtag MeTooInceste, together with written questions tabled in the French National Assembly on sexual violence against children, confirms the scale of intrafamilial violence and the reluctance of institutions to register and investigate complaints.

These persistent practices breach the obligations of France under the three conventions cited above: they subject mothers to discriminatory treatment, fail to place the best interests of the child at the center of decisions, tolerate pseudo scientific concepts in judicial proceedings, and inflict severe and prolonged mental suffering through systemic secondary victimization.

INTERSECTIONAL DISCRIMINATION AND ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES

The harm falls hardest on women who face intersectional discrimination: single mothers, migrant women and women belonging to religious minorities. In November 2023, a police operation involving heavily armed officers targeted Romanian yoga practitioners in France. Dozens of women and men were arrested and detained in degrading conditions, yet no evidence of criminal activity or trafficking was found. The operation illustrates how the self determination of women belonging to a religious minority can be disregarded by authorities that impose a narrative of victimhood on individuals who reject it, and how migrant women face compounded obstacles when seeking protection from the State.

Institutional violence also has a direct economic dimension, which speaks directly to the cross cutting issue chosen for the seventy first session. A mother who reports violence and is then prosecuted or loses custody faces legal costs, housing instability, loss of employment or income, and the interruption of child benefits. Seeking justice thus becomes a pathway into poverty. Poverty in turn traps women in violent relationships, because the economic cost of reporting is known and feared. This vicious circle must be named and broken if the 2030 Agenda is to be honored.

No acceleration of gender equality is possible while women who turn to the State for protection are punished for doing so. Justice systems are not peripheral to the 2030 Agenda: they are the sites where equality is either secured or denied. The review theme, which addresses climate change, environmental degradation and disaster risk, adds a further dimension. In crises, displacement and the aftermath of conflict, protection systems weaken and the same institutional patterns repeat, as documented by the organization in relation to women in Sudan and Ethiopia. Resilient institutions, capable of responding to violence against women even under stress, are a precondition for sustainable development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

First, reform the response of justice and child protection systems to intrafamilial violence. Conduct prompt, effective and impartial criminal investigations before any diversion of cases to other frameworks, and keep the original facts of violence at the center of the judicial response. Prohibit pseudo scientific concepts such as parental alienation in judicial and administrative proceedings. Regulate psychological and psychiatric expertise through binding methodological and ethical standards subject to effective adversarial scrutiny. Adopt legal safeguards preventing the penalization of mothers for acts undertaken to protect their children from alleged violence, pending a full and fair assessment of the risks involved.

Second, recognize institutional violence against women as a distinct form of gender based violence and guarantee survivor centered support that protects economic security. Provide specialized training for judges, social workers, psychologists and police on the dynamics of intrafamilial violence, coercive control and trauma. Guarantee free and confidential access to legal, psychological and social support at all stages of proceedings. Secure access to legal aid, housing, income support and protection of employment, so that seeking justice never results in impoverishment.

Third, measure, monitor and include. Collect and publish disaggregated data on reports of violence, child placements, prosecutions of protective parents and the outcomes of complaints, and ensure independent investigations with effective remedies. Systematically include survivors, civil society organizations and representatives of

minorities in the design and evaluation of policies, and adopt tailored measures for migrant women, single mothers and women belonging to religious minorities.

As the Commission prepares its agreed conclusions, the organization urges Member States to treat the integrity of justice and child protection systems as a core indicator of progress on gender equality. The recommendations above are concrete, costed largely in political will rather than resources, and implementable within the framework of the 2030 Agenda. When a mother is punished for protecting her child, the promise to leave no one behind is broken. Equality will not wait.