

## **United Nations Response to COVID-19 Must Include Trafficked, Prostituted, & Sexually Exploited Persons**

His Excellency Mr. António Guterres Secretary-General  
United Nations  
16 April 2020

Dear Secretary-General Guterres,

### **RE: UN response to COVID -19 must include sex trafficked, prostituted and sexually exploited persons who are made even more vulnerable by the pandemic**

On behalf of the undersigned, sex trade survivors, frontline service providers, and women's and human rights activists, each dedicated to ending the sex trafficking and prostitution of women and girls in our respective countries and worldwide, we have the honor to transmit this letter to you.

We applaud your efforts to highlight the impact of the COVID -19 pandemic on women and girls, and appreciate your call to address the global surge in domestic violence linked to the lockdowns. We are writing today to call on you to ensure that sex trafficked, prostituted and sexually exploited persons are also included in the UN's response to COVID -19.

COVID-19 is laying bare the world's socio-economic structural inequalities, the failure of austerity measures, and clearly demonstrates how crises exacerbate the vulnerabilities of disadvantaged people. *Prostituted persons, including victims of sex trafficking and sexual exploitation, the majority of whom are women and girls, are disproportionately impacted by the pandemic.* The United Nations must not leave them behind.

The *lives of prostituted persons are often rooted in structural inequalities*, sex- and gender-based violence, discrimination, poverty, displacement, racism, xenophobia and systemic failures – which the pandemic has exposed and amplified. The COVID -19 outbreak is leaving prostituted persons exponentially vulnerable to new forms of abuse and is increasing poverty, as they lack safety nets. Every day, we receive reports that women in prostitution are burdened by their desperate need to survive, when no food, safe shelter, or medical assistance are available to them or to their children. They are in further danger of being re-trafficked and sexually exploited with all of the associated physical, psychological, and life-threatening harms, including increased risk of catching COVID -19. *Their access to support structures and exit services is increasingly limited, if existent at all.*

We are also documenting reports of *increased online exploitation of women and children*, including through a surge in the use of pornographic websites and other online exploitation vehicles. As men move online looking for non-contact opportunities for sexual gratification, they are joining sexual predators and profiteers who were already using the internet to exploit and

abuse women and children at an unprecedented global scale. Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the anonymity and ever-increasing connectivity afforded by the internet, which in the current environment is not being monitored by humans, means increasing numbers of women and children, especially adolescent girls, are vulnerable to grooming, online sexual exploitation and sextortion leading to sex trafficking.

Our collective obligation to ensure that sex trafficked, prostituted and sexually exploited people, consisting overwhelmingly of women and children, are adequately protected and supported is both critical and urgent. We are calling on your office to ***establish a global fund for people exploited in the sex trade*** to enable them to access comprehensive services. Whilst the Fund would respond to immediate and short-term needs of these individuals, it would also focus on providing exit support for those who seek to leave systems of sexual exploitation. This Fund must be accessible to all women who are incarcerated and detained for prostitution-related charges.

Finally, this Fund should support efforts, organizations or networks that, in line with international law and human rights principles, seek to address the structural inequalities that push women into prostitution rather than entrench a system where women and girls are exploited. The goal of the Fund should be to assist and uplift human beings who are bought and sold in the global multi-billion dollar sex trade; not further enable their profiteers or exploiters who deem sexual exploitation as a form of labour. In addition, we are calling on you to ***make addressing online sexual exploitation a priority*** as part of efforts to address the impact of the pandemic.

We thank you for your leadership in promoting the rights of women and girls, and remain available to discuss the issues we have raised in this letter.

Respectfully,

Yasmeen Hassan  
Global Executive Director Equality Now

cc.

Ms. Maria Luiza Ribeiro Viotti  
Chef de Cabinet to UN Secretary General

Ms. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Executive Director, UN Women

Ms. Åsa Regnér,  
Deputy Executive Director, UN Women

Taina Bien-Aime  
Executive Director  
Coalition Against Trafficking in Women

***Survivors:***

Aleida Carreño Buelvas  
 Aleida Ortiz Gonzales  
 Ally-Marie Diamond  
 Elisa Valera Soba  
 Elizabeth Soba Diaz  
 Fiji Phoenix  
 Gabriela Lozano  
 Gloria Zuleima Carreño Buelvas  
 Grizelda Grootboom  
 Huschke Mau  
 Jeanette Westbrook  
 Nidia Ramiez  
 Nomonde Mhlali Meiji Pilar Carreño  
 Simone Watson  
 SPACE International-USA Summer Carter  
 Survivor Exit  
 Survivors for Solutions Yanet Peña Peña  
 Yuli Duarte Peña

***Organizations:***

1000 Möjligheter/1000 Opportunities Action Against Violence and Exploitation AkiDwA  
 Amicale du Nid  
 Anti-Violence Network of Georgia  
 Apne Aap Women Worldwide  
 Arcidonna napoli  
 Asociación Feminista Tiemar  
 Associació de Dones Antígona  
 Association La Source  
 Association MARTA Centre  
 Association Mémoire Traumatique et Victimologie  
 Association Women for the Contemporary Society  
 Autonomous Women's Center Belgrade Baby Milk Action  
 Breaking Free  
 Bridge North Women's Mentorship & Advocacy Service  
 Bright Fame  
 Build a girl  
 Businesswomen Organisation of Lithuanian Ethnic Groups  
 CAP International  
 Center for Sustainable Communities Development  
 Central Arizona National Lawyers Guild  
 Centre of Gender Culture

Charitable organization “Community Foundation of Kherson “Zakhyst”  
 Citrus Health Network  
 Civic Alliance Political action of women Clara-magazine  
 Coordination française du Lobby Européen des femmes  
 Coalition Against Trafficking in Women Coalition Against Trafficking in Women – Asia Pacific (CATW-AP)  
 Coalition Against Trafficking in Women Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) Colombian’s femicides Foundation Compass31.org  
 Consejo Nacional De Mujeres De Colombia Concertation des luttes contre l’exploitation sexuelle (CLES)  
 Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd (Global)  
 Conseil National des Femmes du Luxembourg  
 Corporación Mujer Denuncia y Muévete Courage for Freedom  
 ECPAT-USA  
 Eden’s Farm  
 Ehuleak-Comisión investigación malos tratos a mujeres de Navarra  
 Embrace Dignity  
 End the War on Women Collective Engendered Collective  
 Equality Now  
 European Network of Migrant Women (ENoMW)  
 European Women’s Lobby  
 EVA Center  
 Exodus Cry  
 Femmes pour le Dire, Femmes pour Agir Femmes solidaires  
 FiLiA  
 Fondation Scelles  
 Forum femmes méditerranée  
 Fredrika Bremer-förbundet  
 Freedom Challenge  
 GenerationAbolition  
 GENFAMI  
 Hermanas Oblatas del Santísimo Redentor Hungarian Women’s Lobby (Magyar Női Érdekérvényesítő Szövetség)  
 Lanfuissue NGO  
 Iniciativa Pro Equidad  
 initiative feministe euromed IFE-EFI Institute for Feminism & Human Rights International  
 Alliance of Women International Centre on Sexual Exploitation Isala Asbl  
 Journey Out  
 K&k confidential  
 Kafa (enough) Violence & Exploitation Kansai network about Japanese army KFUKs Sociale  
 Arbjede, Denmark Klaipeda Social and Psychological Support Centre  
 la CLEF  
 La Voix des Femmes

Le Monde selon les femmes Libresariannes  
 Life Bloom  
 Ligue du Droit International des Femmes London Abused Women's Centre (Canada) M.A.L.I.  
 Alternative Movement of Individual Liberties  
 Maisha E.V.-African Women in Germany  
 Montreal Council of Women  
 Mujeres Supervivientes de violencias de género  
 National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd  
 National Alliance of Women's Organisations (NAWO) UK  
 National Board of Catholic Women National Center on Sexual Exploitation National Women's  
 Council of Ireland  
 NGO "Center "Women's perspectives"  
 NIA  
 Nordic Model Now!  
 OBJECT  
 Observatoire féministe des violences faites aux femmes (Belgique)  
 One Billion Rising  
 People Serving Girls At Risk  
 Persons Against Non-State Torture  
 Petra mujeres valientes  
 Plataforma Navarra de mujeres por la abolición de la prostitución  
 PornFreeCO  
 Portuguese Platform for Women's Rights Prostitution Research & Education  
 Rad fem Sweden Survivors  
 Realstars  
 Regards de Femmes  
 Resistenza Femminista  
 Réussir l'égalité Femmes-Hommes Rights4Girls  
 Romanian Women's Lobby  
 Ruhama  
 S.H.A.D.E Movement  
 Samaritana Transformation Ministries, Inc. Scelles Foundation  
 Scientists for a world without prostitution SISTERS – for the Exit from Prostitution! E.V.  
 (registered association)  
 Soroptimist International of Suburban Chicago  
 Swedish Women's Lobby  
 Talita Asia  
 Tamasha Talkies Inc.  
 The InMaat Foundation  
 Traductoras para la Abolición de la Prostitución  
 Unizon  
 Vancouver Rape Relief and Women's Shelter  
 Violence Against Women in War Research Action Center

Volyn Press Club

Wahine Toa Rising

Widows Rights International women@thewell

Women Health Philippines Women's Aid

Women's Equal Justice Project Women's Support Project World Without Exploitation