

JCoR written statement for CSW70

As members of the Justice Coalition of Religious—a collaboration among Catholic Sisters, Brothers, priests, and their lay partners who are working for justice, peace, and the integral ecology—we approach this 70th Commission on the Status of Women (CSW70) with a social and spiritual mandate that is rooted in Catholic Social Teaching: to uphold the fullness of human dignity that is imbued in all people, regardless of gender.

A survey of our members of our global network, including responses from Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean, Oceania, Europe, and North America illustrated some of the significant and troubling legal and judicial barriers to gender justice that continue to plague national and global progress toward realization of human dignity. More than half of respondents indicated that:

- women and girls in their country must be prepared to face stigma, harassment, or threats of further harm if reporting a crime committed against them;
- corruption in their legal system that makes it more difficult for women/girls to get justice for crimes committed against them; and/or
- women are more vulnerable than men to land-grabbing or forcible displacement from their land.

At least 40% of respondents indicated:

- Women and girls cannot trust law enforcement officers to treat them with respect and dignity;
- Their laws make it difficult for a woman/girl to leave a violent or abusive home or workplace; and/or
- Laws do not ensure that women and men are paid equally for equal work.

Meanwhile, at least a quarter of respondents indicated:

- Crimes committed against women and girls are not taken seriously enough by their courts or legal system;
- If a woman or girl is accused of a crime, she cannot expect to be given a fair trial;
- Their laws do not prohibit or effectively prevent child marriage; and/or
- Their legal system does not serve women/girls as well as it serves men/boys.

Particularly vulnerable within the population of women and girls are migrants who lack the full rights of citizens (and/or knowledge thereof); communities that speak only languages other than the predominant operating language of their country's judiciary; persons who are deaf, blind, or with physical disabilities for whom justice-related buildings and procedures often inaccessible.

Members and partners of our congregations around the world are responding to the mandate of human dignity through a variety of ministries that attempt to support the healing of those who have been harmed by gender-based injustices:

- In response to the devastating sexual crimes and redressal failures committed within the context of our own faith's institutions, our congregations around the world have worked to establish and enact safeguarding measures for children and vulnerable adults, including

training for staff of educational, medical, and social-service institutions in identification and mandatory reporting of abuse.

- “Proyecto La Fragua,” a project of the Claretian Missionaries in Uruguay, offers a space for listening and for the social, legal, and spiritual accompaniment of women who have experienced violence. Through a technical team comprised of a psychologist, a social worker, and a lawyer, the project works with communities in Progreso and its nearby slums to identify instances of violence and invites victims’ neighbors into the process of empowering them to exit and heal from their traumatic environment.
- The women's desk of Moroto Diocese, Uganda, which is run by Comboni Missionary Sisters, addresses forced and early marriage, courtship rape, and other women's-rights abuses through, inter alia, legal support, awareness raising, alternative reintegration, a shelter for survivors, economic empowerment. The Sisters collaborate with police, government, law-enforcement officials, and other stakeholders and are initiating a policy-dialogue programme to identify legislative and judicial solutions to these forms of gender-based violence. The Sisters are engaged in similar ministry in South Africa through a Migrants and Refugees Office in the Diocese of Pretoria, which provides legal and medical support to women with an irregular migration status who have experienced gender-based violence.
- In Hong Kong, the Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd runs shelters for Indonesians and Filipinas who are engaged in foreign domestic work and provide them with gender-sensitization training. They also engage in visitation and psycho-spiritual-social counseling of foreign domestic workers who are being held in prison because they were accused of a crime and did not have access to legal counsel in order to defend themselves.
- The Passionist Sisters in Eastern Cameroon sponsor a ministry of legal, financial, social, and political empowerment among Catholic women who are teachers. The ministry responds to gender-biased policies that impede women’s economic security and psychosocial well-being. They train teachers to know and defend their property rights, equip them as para-legals who can train and support one another, facilitate psychosocial and peer counseling, and support cooperative savings-and-loan groups. They also organize “Dialogue Forums” with Traditional Leaders and Parish Councils to promote rights-respecting practices in their own communities.

Recognizing that *prevention* of gender injustice is both more just and more practically effective than efforts to heal the harms they cause, our network of Catholic Religious and their lay partners is also committed to active participation in the public and political life of our respective societies, in order to contribute to transformation of social, political, economic, legal, judicial structures. To that end, we call on the Member States of the United Nations to take the following measures:

- Partner with leaders of local NGOs, faith communities, and essential-service providers to raise public awareness of long-term harms caused by Female Genital Mutilation; non-education of girls; child/early/forced marriages and pregnancy; imposition of gender stereotypes; stigmatization or exclusion of victims of sexual violence, women without children, unmarried mothers, transgender persons, persons with sexually-transmitted infections, and widows from family or community life

- Provide comprehensive sexuality education—including concepts of healthy relationships, consent, and bodily autonomy—for all youth in government-sponsored schools
- Establish and enact safeguarding measures for children and vulnerable adults, including training for staff of educational, medical, and social-service institutions in identification and mandatory reporting of abuse.
- Support families' freedom to employ non-traditional division of family-caretaking labour through parental- and family-leave policies that apply to people of all genders and a ban on gender-discriminatory wage policies across all employment sectors
- Integrate basic instruction in the nation's most commonly used sign language for all students throughout primary school
- Establish an emergency-housing programme for victims of gender-based violence and their dependents, featuring a housing-first approach with gender-responsive support services
- Remove all gender-based distinctions in legal codes regarding the rights to inherit/own land or assets, to be protected from arbitrary confiscation of/forcible displacement from land, to seek employment in any field, to receive compensation commensurate with one's labor, to participate in elections, and to seek any political office
- Establish educational and entrepreneurship loans for women and girls in remote areas, those with disabilities, and those from ethnic- or linguistic-minority communities
- Ban perpetrators of gender-based violence from purchase and registry of firearms
- Exempt victims of trafficking from punishment for actions their traffickers compelled them to take
- Decouple all work visas from specific employers
- Mandate that all foreign employment recruiters operating within the country utilise a thorough employer-vetting and employee follow-up processes to avoid trafficking and exploitation of their clients
- Establish, throughout the continuum of criminal-justice institutions and procedures, training and other provisions for the protection of the dignity, safety, and privacy of any person filing a legal complaint of trafficking or sexual violence and an independent, gender-responsive redressal mechanism for grievances against officers of the law and courts themselves or against labour-recruitment agencies
- Establish accessibility provisions that support the participation of those in remote areas, with disabilities, or in linguistic-minority communities in elections and political life
- Establish foreign-debt restructuring or forgiveness programmes that redirect loan-servicing payments of developing countries to their national budgets for free legal services for victims of gender-based violence and for free education/vocational training for all children and youth, including accessibility accommodations for children in remote areas, with disabilities, or in linguistic-minority communities

On the occasion of CSW70, we stand ready to collaborate with all States toward achievement of the measures above. Furthermore, we rededicate ourselves to good-faith participation in the ongoing reform of our disparate and shared frameworks for the articulation, protection, restoration, and fulfillment of rights until the full human dignity of people of all genders is reflected therein.