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Statement submitted by Casa Generalizia della Società del Sacro Cuore, Company of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, Congregation of the Mission, Congregations of St. Joseph, Dominican Leadership Conference, Fondazione Proclade Internazionale - Onlus, Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary-Loreto Generalate, International Presentation Association, Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers, Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary, Salesian Missions Inc., School Sisters of Notre Dame, Sisters of Charity Federation, Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, UNANIMA International, non-governmental organizations 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

As organizations representing Catholic women and men Religious and our broad network of partners in mission, we stand firmly behind the principle that all people, regardless of gender, are equal in dignity and rights. We also hold up the belief that, while equal, each person has a singular perspective and wisdom carved from a singular experience of the world. It is the great task of each society and each institution, from the grassroots to the United Nations, to hold in balance an appreciation and openness to the unique gifts offered by each one of us, while building consensus around common ideas and values that can move us all forward and secure all our rights.

To the degree that we succeed in honoring this simultaneous uniqueness and universality in our governance structures, we succeed in achieving our ultimate goal: a global community of beloved kin, ready to uplift any member upon whom disaster falls. As His Holiness Pope Francis stated in his address to civil society and the diplomatic corps of Estonia in 2018, “A land will be fruitful, and its people bear fruit and give birth to the future, only to the extent that it can foster a sense of belonging among its members, create bonds of integration between generations and different communities; and avoid all that make us insensitive to others and lead to further alienation.” Though it may be impractical to allow a seat for every member of a given community at its central decision-making table, we can and we must take every viable measure to ensure that all are fairly and authentically represented. Fair, authentic representation requires spaces for women and girls not only to participate in, but also to lead their societies’ movement toward their liberation from violence and discrimination.

Women's and girls' autonomy, ownership, and voice are at the core of the best strategies we employ as Religious Sisters, Brothers, and Fathers whose ministries aim to achieve an end to all forms of gender-based violence and discrimination in concert with other Sustainable Development Goals. For example, the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary in Minas Gerais, Brazil have formulated specialized ministry to support communities devastated by (and neglected following) the environmental violence of the tailings dam failures at Mariana (2015) and Brumadinho (2019). The Sisters accompany women most affected by the environmental disaster by convening them as a community of craftswomen to embroider their history of pain, loss, and work toward hope. Through this communal form of art therapy, the Sisters collaborate with women's groups to find and raise their voices and to partner with broader coalitions in calling for accountability on the part of the mining companies and government for a just response to environmental violence, which disproportionately burdens women and girls.

The Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur in the Democratic Republic of Congo provide another example of women's and girls' co-creatorship in Religious ministry aimed at reducing gender-based violence and discrimination. In collaboration and community with local women, the Sisters developed a theory of change that women's liberation from violence and discrimination requires a pathway out of the primary source of vulnerability in their homes and in society: financial dependence. Their Groupe de Solidarite, de'Epargne et de Credit offers women training on credit and saving systems and facilitates the establishment of peer-

to-peer microlending communities. Participants establish rules and norms to govern how they will save and share resources and they install a Community Director who helps in applying these rules. Women who have benefited from the Groupe then serve as agents of resilience building for women in neighboring villages by training and encouraging other women in nearby communities to get organized.

The several congregations under the umbrella of the Salesian Missions are deeply engaged in empowering the voices of women and girls via community-level “gender committees” and the innovative structure of “children’s parliaments” and community-level child rights clubs. Through a home for women and child victims of trafficking and a community outreach effort known as “The Gender Project” in Andhra Pradesh, India, lay and Religious members of the Salesian community raise community awareness of relevant laws that address violence against women and girls and of policies in place for relief and rehabilitation in cases of abuse or exploitation. Adults and schoolchildren are also taught advocacy skills such as petitioning, community mobilization, and campaign organization to address violence on a systemic level. Notably, Children’s Parliaments and child rights clubs require gender balance among representatives of the local youth. Women and girls empowered in this manner also serve as members of village-level child protection committees and boards set up by the government to monitor and redress violence against women and girls.

Several key lessons we have learned from the aforementioned programmes (and from our many, varied, and long-standing ministries in some of the most remote areas of the globe)

apply directly to the theme being considered by the 65th UN Commission on the Status of women.

(a) Leadership that leads to sustainable progress is proportionately comprised of those who have historically been marginalised. It is a work of creative collaboration that aims to deconstruct power inequities among its members.

(b) Women's and gender-balanced children's groups based in marginalized communities play a major role in strengthening self-confidence among women and girls; providing them with a designated space for mutual support; building their capacities and competencies to achieve basic security for themselves, their families, and their communities; and strengthening their voices in advocacy for the solutions they see to local problems.

(c) Girls are not merely tomorrow's women. They are citizens, thought leaders, and contributors both inside and outside their homes, and they have needs, rights, and gifts that it would behoove us all to honor in the present.

We call on the Members States of the United Nations to create pathways for input from women's groups and gender-representative children's parliaments in marginalized communities by:

-Incentivizing local- and provincial-level government offices to hold hearings or create a designated council for these groups and requiring children's parliaments to have a gender composition proportional to the youth population in that region

-Designating seats in their national delegations to the UN Commissions, High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, UNFCCC Conference of Parties, and other UN fora for

representatives of these groups from rural communities, environmentally devastated or threatened communities; indigenous or tribal groups; religious, ethnic, and linguistic minority groups

-Establishing a civil society consultation process as part of any national environmental impact assessment protocol for construction or extraction projects, and require that projects receive free, prior, informed consent from women's groups and children's parliaments in communities that will be affected before the project can proceed to implementation

-Establishing a civil society consultation process for the creation of their Voluntary National Reviews on the Sustainable Development Goals and national Universal Periodic Review reports to the Human Rights Council that requires solicitation of input from women's community groups and gender-representative children's parliaments in each sub-national region

-Increasing funding for community-based legal, social, and financial support services for survivors of gender-based and environmental violence

-Providing access to quality formal education and financial and entrepreneurial skills training for women and girls as education is fundamental to women's full and effective participation and decision-making in public life

-Closing the gender digital divide to ensure that women and girls can participate equally with men and boys in distance learning; contribute to and benefit from technological innovation; and access internet-based pathways for recourse and support in the event of gender-based violence or gender-disproportionate impacts of environmental violence.

We stand ready to support the United Nations and its Member States in implementing each of the aforementioned actions so that all lands may be fruitful, all peoples may bear fruit, and we can, together, give birth to the future.