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Statement submitted by **Victim Support Europe**, 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.

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* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

Statement

Victim Support Europe is thankful for the opportunity to contribute a written statement on the 71st Commission on the Status of Women theme: Accelerating the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Gender equality requires systems that recognise victims, make support accessible, protect rights, enable recovery and ensure that no victim is excluded because of their circumstances or where the crime occurred. Gender equality cannot be achieved unless women and girls who experience violence can access protection, support, justice and effective remedies, without discrimination or additional harm.

Gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls are essential to protecting victims' rights. Violence and discrimination undermine women's safety, autonomy and equal participation in society. The Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goals 3, 5, 10 and 16 are integral to ensuring victims of crime have access to respect and dignity, information, support, justice as well as compensation and restoration. If the Goals are fully implemented, women will then be able to fully exercise their rights and participate in society without violence, fear of violence and sufficient response to victimisation.

Victims experience a range of barriers, including unstable housing and finances, inaccessible support or justice systems, participation in education and employment. These barriers exasperate inequality and make rights on paper inaccessible in practice.

Victim Support Europe works to centre victims' voices and needs across the globe, focusing on victim support, advocating for victim-centred, trauma-informed, inclusive and accessible services coordinated with justice systems. Their work addresses victims' needs,

barriers and professional, collaborative and solution-oriented support. Victim Support Europe focuses on all victims of crime, regardless of their background, personal characteristics or the type of crime experienced, however, this statement will focus on women and girls.

Despite significant legal advances, dedicated support systems, and civil society initiatives, women and girls still face major risks of victimisation. Violence against women does not only involve physical acts of aggression, but also occurs at a societal and systemic level, taking the form of discrimination, reinforcing stereotypes and stigma.

Gender-based violence continues to affect millions of women and girls. According to the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, one in three women in the European Union has experienced physical violence, including threats, or sexual violence in adulthood. A significant proportion of these acts take place in private settings. Meaning, women experience high rates of intimate partner violence and domestic abuse, contributing to the disproportionate representation of women among victims of intimate partner homicide and femicide.

These experiences can lead to physical and mental health problems which, if not appropriately addressed, may have long-lasting consequences for victims' well-being. Women who have experienced gender-based violence may face social exclusion, stigma, and financial insecurity. This is why it is also crucial to achieve Sustainable Goals 3, 4, and 8.

Violence against women and girls remains widely underreported. Based on research conducted by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, only around one in eight women who have experienced violence report the incident directly to the police. Access to

victim support should not depend on whether a crime has been reported to the police or victim willingness to participate in criminal proceedings.

The impact of gender-based violence is influenced by intersecting forms of discrimination, which create different barriers to accessing protection, justice and support services. Factors such as migration status, gender, sexuality, disability, age, ethnicity, race and religion may affect victims' experiences and needs. For example, victims with disabilities may face communication barriers, inaccessible premises and information. Migrant women may experience language barriers, limited knowledge of available services and fear of immigration-related consequences.

An intersectional approach must recognise these different needs rather than a one size fits all model. This requires reasonable accommodation, interpretation, accessible information, specialist services, safe referrals and training for frontline workers to identify and respond to needs. These measures are essential to ensuring victim-centred, trauma-informed support and advancing SDG 16 on access to inclusive institutions, in line with the 'leave no one behind' commitment.

Effective victim support must go beyond protection and justice. Women and girls should be supported in rebuilding their autonomy and participating fully in society through access to healthcare, safe housing, education, employment, financial independence and long-term psychosocial support. These measures can help address the social and economic consequences of violence, reduce dependency and exclusion, and support recovery. They are essential to advancing the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goals 3, 4, 5, 8 and 10.

Cybercrime has increasingly become a serious risk, including online fraud and scams; AI-enabled harms, deepfakes and image-based abuse; online hate; technology-facilitated violence; child online exploitation; and forced criminality and online recruitment. This statement will focus on technology-facilitated gender-based violence against women and girls.

Technology-facilitated gender-based violence affects people of all genders, but disproportionately targets women and girls, exacerbating existing inequalities and creating new harms. Manifestations include non-consensual image-based sexual abuse, cyberstalking, online coercion, doxxing, and economic abuse. According to the European Institute for Gender Equality, women are significantly more likely to experience cyber violence. Referring to their recent report, 7% of women who have ever worked in the EU have experienced online sexual harassment in the workplace. Additionally, an extended survey found that 11.7% of women in eight EU Member States experienced sexual cyber harassment, while 8.5% experienced cyberstalking.

The borderless and persistent nature of digital abuse allows it to follow victims across platforms, geographies, and into their physical lives. They can cause psychological distress, reputational damage, and financial losses, potentially leading victims to withdraw from education, employment or public life. The persistence and repeated circulation of abusive content can prolong victimisation long after the initial incident, making timely removal, access to support and effective remedies essential.

Due to the nature of this crime, law enforcement authorities face practical challenges, such as preserving digital evidence, conducting cross-border investigations, and cooperating

with the platforms on which the abuse took place. This is why technology-facilitated gender-based violence must be integrated into legal frameworks with cross-border victims being specifically addressed as avenues for justice are currently limited. Coordinated action should include mandatory digital literacy and comprehensive sex and gender education, platform accountability, victim support services tailored to online harms, and improved cross-border law enforcement cooperation. Further, the rise of online misogyny and radicalisation of young men and boys fuels online and offline violence, undermines gender equality efforts and must be incorporated into gender equality and digital policies and legislation. Tackling online misogyny is crucial to challenging harmful attitudes and preventing the perpetuation of gender-based violence.

Progress towards SDG 16 requires accessible justice systems and effective cross-border cooperation, including referral mechanisms between countries, continuity of victim support, and access to justice where jurisdictions differ. This is particularly important for technology-facilitated crimes, as these cases are often cross-border by nature.

Support for victims should not only be a response to violence; it needs to be part of the infrastructure required for women's equality and empowerment. To continue pursuing goals such as achieving greater gender equality and reducing inequalities, it is essential to prioritise access to justice and effective institutions, as well as the promotion of good health and well-being among women and girls.

To bolster equality for victims through the Sustainable Development Goals, they must:

- Centre victims' voices, needs and rights.

- Prioritise the inclusion of free, confidential, accessible and specialised support, and promote effective referral pathways and cooperation between relevant stakeholders, regardless of whether victims report crimes.
- Strengthen victim protection, platform accountability, and effective remedies for digital harms.
- Ensure long-term, predictable, sustainable and accessible funding for organisations working with and for victims.
- The implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals needs to be victim-centred and accessible, addressing individual and intersectional needs.

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