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Statement submitted by European Women’s Lobby, National Federation of International Immigrant Women Associations and Sveriges Kvinnolobby, 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

On the 16th of June 2011 trade unions came together to adopt the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 189 on decent work for domestic workers. Domestic workers all over the world are targets of violence and other human rights abuses. It is estimated that at least 80 per cent of all domestic workers are women which means that this group is disproportionately affected by these conditions. In the light of the 61st Commission on the Status of Women theme, “Women’s economic empowerment in the changing world of work”, we call on all United Nations Member States to address the situation of female migrant and domestic workers and to take urgent actions to ensure decent working conditions and human rights.

In 2010, ILO estimated that only 10 per cent of all domestic workers were covered by labour legislation to the same extent as other workers. More recent statistics show that domestic workers earn less than half of average wages and sometimes no more than about 20 per cent. 90 per cent do not have access to social protection, such as pensions and unemployment benefits. A recent ILO analysis also shows that 17 per cent of all domestic workers are migrants. As the vast majority of domestic workers are women, it is of most importance that all policies and measures have a gender equality perspective, taking into account the specific needs of women domestic workers, and ensuring their human rights. The fact that migrant female domestic workers are more vulnerable to exploitation and abuse than men, particularly sexual exploitation, also needs to be recognized and tackled.

Today, millions of people are working in the domestic sector and recent United Nations estimates on population and ageing confirm that the demand for domestic work is likely to grow. Ageing populations, public care cuts and an increasing number of women entering the labour force worldwide makes families increasingly turn to domestic workers to care for their homes, children and ageing parents. It is essential to protect the rights of the increasing number of female domestic workers.

There are several circumstances that make the conditions that migrant female domestic workers are facing particularly exploitive and abusive. Susceptible to gender-based segregation in the workplace, migrant women are often employed in individualized or isolated work environments where there is rarely any visibility. Often, the workers are promised decent salaries and good working conditions, but in the end the employers are abusive. Domestic workers are targets of physical and sexual violence as well as human trafficking.

In June 2012, the European Commission urged Member States to ratify the Domestic Workers Convention in the context of the European Union Strategy towards the Eradication of Trafficking in Human Beings. In 2014, the European Commission yet again entreated the European Union member States to implement the ILO Convention. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women agrees on the importance of ratifying the ILO Convention 189. In their Concluding Observations to several state parties, the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women Committee urge member states to ratify the Convention, which is also in accordance with the Istanbul Convention.

Raising the standards of domestic working conditions worldwide will also contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, including poverty (Goal 1), gender equality (Goal 5), decent work (Goal 8), and inequality (Goal 10).

The European Network of Migrant Women also states that ratifying the Domestic Workers Convention is an urgent issue. Enforcing the Convention across the European Union should be a priority in securing decent work and social security for all migrant workers, including migrant women domestic workers. European Network of Migrant Women calls on European Union Member States to ensure that the protection of domestic workers and their access to rights and justice is not limited to documented migrants only, but is extended to all migrants employed in this sector, without any exceptions.

It is urgent to address and counteract the discrimination and exploitation that female domestic workers, and especially migrant women, are facing. United Nations Member States need to fulfil their responsibilities and protect domestic workers through law and policy, and ensure that all necessary measures are taken to ensure economic empowerment of all women, regardless of their profession, marital status, citizenship or age. Ratifying the ILO convention is essential in ensuring women's economic independence in the changing world of work.

We therefore urge United Nations Member States to ratify and implement the Convention by ensuring that:

- Domestic workers receive equal treatment with other workers with regard to compensation and benefits, for example in the case of maternity, parental or sick leave.
- Domestic workers have and are informed about safe terms and details of their employment.
- Domestic workers are protected against discrimination of any kind and that they have easy access to complaint mechanisms.
- Domestic workers are offered safe and decent living conditions.
- Domestic workers have guaranteed access to affordable high quality child and elderly care.
- Mechanisms and policies ensure an end to impunity in cases of violence, sexual abuse or exploitation of domestic workers.
- Women's organizations are involved and listened to in processes and policies on domestic work.

The Swedish Women's Lobby (Sveriges Kvinnolobby)

The European Women's Lobby

Background documents:

ILO: http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_protect/---protrav/---travail/documents/briefingnote/wcms_490778.pdf

ENoMW: http://picum.org/picum.org/uploads/file_/ENoMW%20International%20Domestic%20Workers%20Day%20statement%202014_1.pdf