**Call for input to the report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls to the Human Rights Council on prostitution and violence against women and girls**

***Contributions from Maldives***

1. ***Provide examples of the hidden forms of prostitution, and explain to what extent they are recognized and dealt with as such?***
   1. In Maldives, prostitution is mostly carried out under the cover of legitimate registered businesses. Maldives Police Services (MPS) conducts raids and investigations into such establishments, and where required, deports any foreigners involved in such activities. It is observed that a majority of individuals are mostly from South East and Central Asian countries.
   2. At law, Section 29 of the Act Number 17/2014 (Sexual Offences Act) covers the offense of prostitution. Section 33 of the Act, creates the offence of setting up, maintaining and managing a brothel in Maldives. Section 31 also makes it an offence to traffic a person into Maldives with the knowledge that the person is being transferred for the purpose of prostitution.
2. ***Describe the profile of women and girls affected by prostitution in your country, and provide disaggregated data, where possible.***
   1. Law enforcement observes that mainly foreigners in Maldives engage in prostitution. It is also observed that majority of individuals either grapple with substance abuse related issues and/or are in an economically underprivileged position. In cases concerning child sexual exploitation, children are also found to be belonging to vulnerable families.
3. ***Describe the profile of those who solicit women in prostitution and whether such relations are regulated, and provide supporting data, where possible.***
   1. It has been observed that the majority of the offenders are foreigners, predominantly originating from South East Asia and Central Asia.
4. ***What forms of violence are prostituted women and girls subjected to (physical, psychological, sexual, economic, administrative, or other)?***
   1. Women and girls in prostitution are usually subject to an array of abuses including physical harm, psychological violence, and economic harm. Efforts are currently underway within relevant state institutions to enhance the accuracy and comprehensiveness of data collection in order to address this issue more effectively.
5. ***Who is responsible for the perpetration of violence against women and girls in prostitution?***
   1. A prevalent trend involves the collaboration of foreigners with locals in perpetrating violence against women and girls engaged in prostitution.
6. ***Describe the linkages, if any, between prostitution and the violation of the human rights of women and girls.***
   1. The connection between prostitution and the violation of the human rights of women and girls is evident, as those engaged in these activities often face various forms of abuse. Engaging in prostitution often results in some form of physical, psychological, and sexual abuse, jeopardizing the right to dignity, security, and well-being. In Maldives, law enforcement observes that cases of prostitution typically do not involve minors.
7. ***What links are there between pornography and/or other forms of sexual exploitation and prostitution?***
   1. There is no specific data available to support a linkage.
8. ***How is the issue of consent dealt with? Is it possible to speak about meaningful consent for prostituted women and girls?***
   1. It is observed that consent is often obtained by leveraging the individual’s low socio-economic situation and basic needs against the option of prostitution. It is observed that socio-economic limitations render individuals more vulnerable to potential compulsion to prostitution.
   2. Concerning children, legislative provisions on consent in the Act Number 12/2009 (Special Provisions Act dealing with Child Sex Abuse Offenders) prevents children from consenting to any sexual activity. As such, awareness programs conducted by the Ministry of Social and Family Development focuses on educating children on this.
9. ***How effective have legislative frameworks and policies been in preventing and responding to violence against women and girls in prostitution?***
   1. The legislative framework adequately provides for the protection of women and girls who are subjected to violence and prostitution. As such, Sexual Offences Act (as mentioned above) creates the offences of engaging people in prostitution, trafficking persons both into the Maldives and from one island to the other, with the knowledge that the person will be exploited for prostitution. This is further reinforced in Act Number 12/2013 (Anti Human Trafficking Act), where Section 13 (a) subsection 5 recognizes coercion to engage in prostitution as an act of exploitation punished under the Act. Concerning girls, the Act Number 19/2019 (Child Rights Protection Act) creates the offence of exploiting children by recruiting children to commit criminal offences, and grooming children to engage in sexual activities.
10. ***What measures are in place to collect and analyse data at the national level with a view to better understanding the impact that prostitution has on the rights of women and girls?***
    1. Currently, there is no systematic method to collect, manage and analyze data.
11. ***What measures are in place to assist and support women and girls who wish to leave prostitution?***
    1. It is acknowledged that there needs to be enhanced support provided to adult women who wish to disengage from prostitution. As for girls, the Child Right Protection Act establishes a comprehensive multi-stakeholder response mechanism, whereby children subjected to exploitation are referred to the Child and Family Protection Services (CFPS) to ensure their protection and placement in an environment conducive to their physical and mental well-being. As such, functional referral mechanisms have been established between government stakeholders in attending cases of commercial sexual exploitation of children. CFPS works alongside MPS and other relevant authorities in ensuring the safety of the child.
12. ***What are the obstacles faced by organizations and frontline service providers in their mission to support victims and survivors of prostitution?***
    1. One significant obstacle observed by law enforcement and social sector institutions is the absence of a streamlined system for rehabilitation and reintegration. This difficulty hinders efforts to help individuals leave prostitution and rebuild their lives successfully. The absence of a well-organized framework may lead to gaps in providing crucial support services like counseling, vocational training, and social assistance. This, in turn, leaves survivors without the necessary resources to overcome the challenges associated with their past experiences in prostitution.
13. ***What are some of the lessons learned about what works and what does not when it comes to stemming any negative human rights consequences from the prostitution of women and girls?***
    1. A comprehensive base-line study needs to be conducted on the interconnectivity of engaging in prostitution, socio-economic status and obstacles to disengage from prostitution. Such a study will better inform law enforcement and social services interventions to protect women and girls from the resulting violence.
14. ***Are frontline organizations and survivors' organisations sufficiently included in policymaking at the national and international level?***
    1. In Maldives, it is observed that the current policies in practice, particularly relating to social services and economic empowerment primarily cater to locals. Given that prostitution frequently involves foreigners, the need to establish a strong social security system for foreigners within the jurisdiction has been recognized. This extends to their meaningful involvement in shaping policies to strengthen existing systems, fostering a more inclusive approach to address the diverse challenges associated with prostitution.
15. ***What recommendations do you have to prevent and end violence associated with the prostitution for women and girls?***
    1. To effectively address violence linked to prostitution, it is recognized that the legal framework should be developed to afford necessary protections to those rendered vulnerable to prostitution and effectively penalize parties who compel women and girls to engage in prostitution.
    2. Secondly, legal reforms should be accompanied by strong socio-economic support mechanisms tailored for women and girls involved in or affected by prostitution. Enhancing access to resources and opportunities is fundamental in mitigating vulnerabilities.
    3. Furthermore, a multi-agency approach is recommended to combat crimes associated with prostitution. This approach involves coordination between law enforcement, social services, and advocacy groups. By working collectively, these agencies can better address the root causes of violence, provide effective support services, and contribute to the overall prevention and cessation of violence related to prostitution.