

Oral Statement | *Prepared by the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs of the World Council of Churches*

General Discussion | *57th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women*

The World Council of Churches, a global fellowship of churches with a total membership of 580 million wrote in March 1992 to the Secretary General of the United Nations, “In various international fora, women are urging the United Nations to recognize that violence against women constitutes the violation of the basic human rights of half the world’s population. As Christians we support these initiatives, guided by the firm conviction that all human beings are made in the image of God and deserve protection and care.”

In a statement prepared for the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, the World Council of Churches said:

It has been painful for us to acknowledge that institutions which should stand in solidarity with women, including governments and the churches, have not often responded with resolute action. We encounter, through our contact with women at the periphery of all our societies, the struggle for dignity and livelihood that women engage in every day. We believe that empowerment is not possible as long as women live in contexts of violence, often exacerbated by cultural and religious tradition.

It was also said:

We draw the attention to the liberating power of religions and we affirm the positive and supportive role that the churches and other religious institutions can play in standing in solidarity with those women who have to make ethical choices and decisions regarding their sexual and reproductive rights. But of equal concern to the World Council of

Churches is the increasing religious extremism in all faiths and the deleterious consequences this has on women's legal, political and social rights.

These statements were made two decades ago, but they are still valid and highly relevant in relation to the work of the Commission on the Status of Women today. Now, more than ever, it is necessary to reiterate that women's rights are human rights, and that human rights are universal. Traditional values or religious beliefs cannot justify the acceptance of violence against women, nor can they be accepted as limitations on women's rights and freedom. Women as well as men are created in the image of God and deserve to be respected, protected, and cared for. It is necessary for member states to agree upon and protect strong international frameworks. Civil society, including the faith based community, has an important role to challenge attitudes and traditions that contribute to undermining women's rights and dignity. We the peoples of the United Nations have a shared responsibility to protect, defend, and expand women's rights and freedom.