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**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and
to the special session of the General Assembly entitled
“Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace
for the twenty-first century”: implementation of strategic
objectives and action in critical areas of concern and
further actions and initiatives**

Statement submitted by Armenian Relief Society and International Council of Jewish Women, 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.



Statement

The Armenian Relief Society and the International Council of Jewish Women congratulate the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) on its two years of operation and embrace its vision to meet the needs of the world's women. We applaud the States Members of the United Nations for establishing an entity solely focused on gender equality and the empowerment of women. As the Executive Director of UN-Women, Michelle Bachelet, stated, gender equality must become a lived reality and, until such is achieved, development and peace will wane. There is no gender-related issue more fundamental and important to healthy societies than the human right of women and girls to live without violence. We accept with enthusiasm the priority theme of the fifty-seventh session of the Commission on the Status of Women, namely, the elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls. For the organizations, the prevention of violence against girls is of highest concern because of the damage done to lives marred by violence in youth. Moreover, the problem of trafficking cannot be separated from this gender-based violence.

Today, violence against women and girls may be considered a global pandemic. It is not restricted by economics, education or geography, but found among all income levels and across the world. It is an issue for all societies in the North and South, and violence persists at all levels, from national to communal to family. According to World Bank data, a woman aged 15-44 is more susceptible to violence than to chronic disease, war or car accidents.

It is well known that violence against women and girls is more prevalent in situations of political, social and economic inequity and conflict, in societies with weak institutions, poor access to information, poor reinforcement of human rights and rigid notions of manhood and in societies where violence is socially accepted as a means to settle interpersonal disputes. Furthermore, the organizations emphasize the importance of focusing on the prevention of violence against girls. The earlier the violence starts, the more difficult the response and rehabilitation are. There are mental and physical health issues and educational deficits that have lifelong consequences.

Violence against women and girls is a violation of the most fundamental of human rights. It is obvious that violence against women and girls is an obstacle to their full and equal development as contributing members of society. The full participation of women in all aspects of society creates an environment in which violence cannot flourish and trafficking is less likely to occur. Evidence shows that communities where women are empowered and have higher socioeconomic status ultimately will be protective against violence.

States have the obligation to uphold human rights for their citizens and must therefore exercise their power to prevent this gender-based violence. Many treaties (national and international), laws and other instruments exist to prevent violence, but full enforcement and an adequate integrated prevention and response strategy is needed. Moreover, States must embrace and implement a multi-sectoral approach to end violence against women and girls. By engaging the public and private sectors and civil society, education, advocacy and training may reach all levels of society, including men and boys. Partnerships across sectors are an important factor to eradicate violence against women and girls.

To that end, the organizations recommend the following to alleviate the gender-based violence pandemic:

(a) Train community counsellors. Follow a “train the trainer” model and establish a person at the community or village level to be the primary educator and counsellor on violence against women and girls. Equip this person with the tools to, inter alia, provide counselling and advice to victims of violence, educate fellow community members on eradicating violence, and advocate for the rights of women and girls across sectors and levels of government. We envision this model for areas outside urban centres and in rural areas;

(b) Establish one-stop service centres, to provide medical support, mental health services, education and programmes on the prevention of violence against women and girls, and to be located in high-population areas.

The above recommendations may be realized through partnerships among sectors and with United Nations entities. Both recommendations require a standard, best-practices model that may be replicated globally yet also remains sensitive to local customs, traditions and laws.

The organizations recognize the value of the programmes of UN-Women, the United Nations Population Fund, the United Nations Children’s Fund, the United Nations Development Programme, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the World Health Organization and the UNiTE to End Violence against Women campaign, among other United Nations entities, including the Commission on the Status of Women, that work towards eradicating violence against women and girls. We strongly encourage continued regard of this issue by the United Nations, especially because of its pandemic proportions. We urge UN-Women and the Commission on the Status of Women to foster and develop non-governmental organization involvement in increasing public awareness of the depth and breadth of the problem of violence against women and girls. To address the problem of violence effectively, it is essential that both men and women work towards prevention and response together. Lastly, we urge States Members of the United Nations to examine their national and local policies on providing basic services and human rights to all citizens and to survey specifics on eradicating violence against women and girls.