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Statement submitted by ISIS: Women’s International Cross-Cultural Exchange, 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.



Statement

Situation of women in conflict and post-conflict communities

During the past 25 years, violence against women and girls in conflict and post-conflict situations has remained a major impediment to the full enjoyment of women's rights and fundamental freedoms. The complicated and complex structures during conflict and post-conflict situations often deny women and girls access to basic services, despite the fact that women's bodies are targeted as weapons of war, in which their bodies are violated sexually, with debilitating physical, psychological and economic effects. Even in times of ceasefire and when calm has been restored, sexual violence continues to be a daily threat and security risk for women and girls. This has been evident in countries affected by armed conflict, such as Afghanistan, the Central African Republic, Chad, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, India, Iraq, Israel, Liberia, Mexico, Myanmar, Nepal, Nigeria, Pakistan, the Philippines, the Russian Federation, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Sudan, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Thailand, Turkey, Uganda and Yemen. The effects have spilled over to many more countries that have to deal with the aftermath of displaced and violated refugees and internally displaced persons, as well as the limited spaces for their participation and decision-making.

In the light of this fragile situation, ISIS: Women's International Cross-Cultural Exchange has identified women and the right to bodily integrity, human security of women and girls, access to resources and livelihood, discriminatory laws and practices, and women's participation in peace processes as key priorities for consideration in post-conflict reconstruction.

The right to bodily integrity is a key contributing factor for the well-being and empowerment of women and girls who continue to live with a high burden of gynaecological and psychological ailments that further deprive them of their ability to engage in productive work and rebuild their lives. This is heightened by the rampant sexual violence that they encounter; the struggle to access health care for different sexual and reproductive health ailments, such as vesicovaginal fistula, cancers of the reproductive organs, infertility and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV; and the lack or absence of well-equipped health facilities within their communities. Women's health is still not taken as a priority by Governments. For instance, whereas the Abuja Declaration on HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Other Related Infectious Diseases requires all African States to allocate 15 per cent of their budget to health, only two have achieved this target.

Human security and access to justice for women and girl survivors is a prerequisite for human rights and peacebuilding. However, in conflict and post-conflict situations, these mechanisms are weakened, with no redress for survivors. Human rights defenders, including women defenders who take up the responsibilities of advocating for survivors of sexual violence, face attacks and threats, such as the assassination attempt on Dr. Denis Mukwege, the Director of Panzi Hospital in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, who has been vocal on the issue of women's rape and sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict situations.

Access to resources and livelihoods is imperative for women and girl survivors of armed conflict, especially in the context of the global economic crisis and neoliberal policies. Their means of production have been destroyed, as land

grabbing has become common and agricultural land is being sold to private companies. This has heightened the global levels of food insecurity and, at times, escalated the levels of violence against women, when they fail to provide for their families. This has forced survivors to undertake risky jobs, such as porters carrying heavy loads of over 60 kg, and coerced them into sexual exploitation, smuggling, working as migrants across borders and engaging in survival sex, among others. All this has led to a state of poverty that has further forced parents to turn their girl children into commodities for sale through child marriages (48 per cent in South Asia, 42 per cent in Africa and 29 per cent in Latin America and the Caribbean). Child marriage (mostly involving girls) is a human rights violation that deepens the culture of violence against women and the state of poverty.

The representation and participation of women in peace processes must remain the priority of Governments. Post-conflict reconstruction initiatives that are structured by men continue to deprive women of the opportunity to participate and exercise their right to engage in governance and decision-making processes. The majority of post-conflict reconstruction resources are focused on infrastructure programmes and are prone to high levels of corruption, leaving communities further impoverished and the burden on women. Undemocratic systems have further limited women's participation owing to the structural and systematic complexities therein.

While Member States have focused their attention on sexual and gender-based violence in conflict and post-conflict situations and international obligations exist to address the issue through such mechanisms as Security Council resolutions 1325 (2000), 1820 (2008), 1880 (2009) and 1890 (2009), 2011 recommendations and declaration of the Heads of State and Government of the member States of the Great Lakes region on ending sexual and gender-based violence, and similar unanimous efforts, the situation of women and girls continues to deteriorate, forcing them into poverty.

As we head towards strategizing for post-2015 development and a new global instrument on violence against women, the time has come to review and re-strategize efforts to respond to and end all forms of violence against women and girls in conflict and post-conflict situations by putting women at the centre of engagement.

We therefore call upon the Commission to:

- (a) Recognize that peace cannot be achieved without addressing the specific needs and priorities of women and girls;
- (b) Deliberate on efforts to create a pathway for designing a new United Nations instrument on violence against women;
- (c) Realize the full implementation of Security Council resolutions 1325 (2000), 1820 (2008) and 1880 (2009), the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa and the African Union gender policy, both in its own policies and programmes and in the countries.

The time has come for all Member States to implement all their commitments and obligations by providing realistic indicators and specific timelines to:

- (a) End sexual violence;
- (b) Provide antiretrovirals and access to information and justice to survivors of HIV/AIDS;
- (c) Develop and strengthen mechanisms to address the long-term problem of trauma and the mental health of survivors of sexual violence.