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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.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

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Statement

Women's Economic Empowerment in the Changing World of Work

It is widely acknowledged that a great number of women around the world are excluded from formal economies despite their remarkable contributions to communities, national economic growth and sustainable development. The gender gap in the world of work, though slowly decreasing, cannot be denied, with multiple examples of exploitation and discrimination of women in the areas of pay, working conditions, maternity protection, job quality, access to economic assets and more. As such, the deliberate effort to invest in women's economic empowerment and close the gaps in women's access to decent work and employment is necessary and commendable.

While taking a closer look at women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work, it is vital that the often-ignored specific case of women affected by armed conflict or war is carefully considered. This category of women is frequently faced with a unique set of discriminatory social attitudes and practices due to their experiences of various forms of sexual and gender-based violence; the "double burden" of caring for children orphaned or those disabled during conflict and the ageing; lack of access to or ownership of land following the death of husbands or the birth of "clan-less" children following abduction or rape; weak social protection measures among other factors.

In societies affected by conflict within Uganda, Liberia and South Sudan, Isis-Women's International Cross-Cultural Exchange has found that women's economic empowerment and access to work opportunities has been curtailed in the absence of programmes supporting access to treatment and nutrition for women war survivors living with HIV/AIDS; trauma management support to address the psychosocial impact of war; deliberate inclusion of women and their specific needs in government post-conflict recovery programmes; as well as addressing the challenges of access to basic social services such as health care, justice or key information for small-holder farmers.

For instance, a recent preliminary study conducted in conflict-affected Northern Uganda with the Tilburg University, Makerere University and Mbarara University found that women who received economic support as well as psychological trauma counselling had higher social economic resilience and were better able to access work opportunities. The women who had higher impact of war events were found to have a strong disability to pay medical bills, less access to information, a negative response to acquiring skills to improve livelihood, no hope of improved income, higher fear of recurrence of war and less trust in leaders to address their post-conflict needs.

Isis-Women's International Cross-Cultural Exchange has also experienced first-hand, the value of an intersectional approach including cash transfers to women working in the informal sector in post-conflict societies within Zimbabwe, Uganda and Liberia. These economically empowered women went on to support other organised groups of women war survivors to work as small-holder farmers, improve their livelihoods and their access to nutritional food and HIV/AIDS treatment.

While robust economic and social policies such as existing labour market policies, are a key element in ensuring women's access to high wage jobs, decent working conditions, less vulnerable employment and equitable opportunities for men and women, more must be done. In line with the Sustainable Development Agenda calling for no one to be left behind, national data must be disaggregated to support tailored action and gender-based impact assessments of national efforts must be conducted to address the extent to which work and employment initiatives advance social justice and inclusive growth.

Women affected by conflict must be involved in shaping the social and economic policies designed for their post-conflict recovery and development. In addition, national capacities must be strengthened to address the structural and cultural barriers limiting conflict-affected women's opportunities to explore the world of work. More attention should be paid to promoting gender-equitable social protection, incorporating issues of importance to women survivors of conflict such as psychosocial support, sexual and gender-based violence prevention, access to financing and asset redistribution.
