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Statement submitted by Women Organization for Development and Capacity Building, 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.



Statement

The Women's Organization for Development and Capacity Building (Labena) and its partners Caucus Organization and Sanad Charity Foundation are pleased to continue their participation in the meetings of the Commission on the Status of Women, United Nations session 62 on gender equality and women empowerment in rural areas.

The Women's organization for development and capacity building (Labena) is a charity-based organization which was established in 2004. The organization's main mandate is to develop the skills and capacity of the women in order to empower women at the different aspect of life in the rural areas. Labena has been focusing on multiplicity of women's and gender issues and developing an integrated and multi-faceted approach to achieve the wellbeing of the rural women. Moreover, Labena advocates for women rights, gender equality and raising awareness on gender and HIV/AIDS as cross cutting issues that are mainstreamed across its interventions in the conflict affected areas. Labena has been awarded consultative position in the parliament to strengthen the economical and social status of women in Khartoum state. Labena is a member of the national organizations network working to combat violence against women and children. To achieve the organization's goals, Labena depends on a broad base of volunteers working at the grassroots level in communities, villages and neighbourhoods called (Labena groups) to deliver its assistance. Through the work with (Labena groups), Labena has successfully made key achievements during the last 10 years in regards to the women empowerment and equality in the rural areas. Labena has formed more than 550 women groups, networks and structures in all its operations areas in Blue Nile, South Kordofan, Central Darfur, Kassala and Khartoum states. The members of these structures/groups, approximately 10,000, women have been trained in different themes and issues and equipped by necessary skills and capacities to participate in community mobilization and awareness as social change agents. Labena has benefited significantly from these structures to achieve major gender advancement, women empowerment and equality at the rural level. Through these groups Labena has raised the awareness of the rural communities on gender equality and women rights among other issues. After long years of work with these communities, the practices and attitude towards women have been positively changed. The women in these areas have been meaningfully included in the decision making process and local governance bodies. In addition, Labena has economically empowered at least 5,000 women through multi-years intervention funded by multi-donors. The targeted women have been trained in small businesses and entrepreneurship and supported by capital and materials to establish sustainable businesses and income generating activities in different rural areas.

The Sudanese women parliamentarian's is an organization that is composes of women parliamentarians membership from the national legislature elected by the whole Sudanese people. They are (155) women parliamentarians in this session. In addition to its monitoring role, the caucus plays a voluntary role in the society. It interacts with the national events and issues, supports the policies that contribute to positive change and promotion of the society and especially women promotion. We tackle social issues and we have solutions. What supports the caucus is the fact that it is accepted on the regional level and it has a special advisory status to the economic and social council of the United Nations since 2014, in addition to the rich experiences of its membership.

Sanad Charity Foundation is voluntary, nonprofit, nongovernmental Organization based in Khartoum. SCF was established by initiative and care of her Excellency the First Lady of Sudan. SCF was registered in Humanitarian Aid Commission (HAC) according to the Act of Humanitarian and Voluntary Work in 2006, so as to respond to different natural and manmade disasters. SCF is providing humanitarian assistances without discrimination in religion, sex, ethnicity and colour to the war affected population. Furthermore, SCF support women and girls and protect their rights, particularly through GBV response and economic empowerment. SCF was among the first partners who responded to the peace initiatives in Darfur through mediation, reconciliation and community mobilization for peaceful co-existence. SCF also works as implementing body for the Office of Sudan's First Lady, H.E. Mrs Widad Babikir under the secretariat of the Office of the African First Ladies against Aids (OAFLA). OAFLA main mandate is to increase the capacity of First Ladies to advocate for effective solutions to respond to three main themes; Reproductive Health (RH) and maternal and infant mortality; the elimination of mother to child transmission of HIV; and Gender-based violence (GBV) and Women Empowerment.

Challenges:

Labena and its partners have been supporting the women empowerment and equality for more than 10 years in Sudan context where women are exposed to different forms of discrimination, social barriers and inequalities. In Sudan, particularly in rural areas, women and girls are the most vulnerable groups during and after the war. However they are not included in the war decisions as well as peace building process. It has been observed that women representation in peace negotiations is completely absent. In the rural areas, women are victims of many protection concerns such as increasing GBV incidents, which go unreported due to social normal and government sensitively against publicity and reporting on the issue. In the rural areas, still families are keen to prepare their daughters for early and arranged marriage rather than the unaffordable and high cost education. Girls' enrolment rate in basic schools is far below the boys' rate. In rural areas of Sudan girls, are forced to go for FGM/C with increased health, where the rate is above 90%. Moreover, the main challenge faced by women that they are not included in the decision-making process at their community. women have limited ownership/access to economic and productive units, opportunities and assets such as land, farms, and markets. This limits their economic independence and self-reliant, while it makes men more powerful and have the sole decision-making power and voice at the house hold and community levels. Despite the good women representation at the political scene, women political leaders did not succeed in establishing operational relations with government officials in line departments for alleviating the public negative perceptions and social norms that discriminate against women and girls at the rural and national level. In addition, women political leaders are still facing challenge in playing more instrumental role for achieving gender advancement by reforming laws and regulation directly affect the women and girls' status.

Opportunities:

In the recent decade, Sudan has made several gender advancements that seek to protect women and girls' rights and help achieve their empowerment. In 2008, in partnership with UNICEF, Sudan has officially adopted Salima national campaign with main objective of ending the female genital mutilation/circumcision (FGM/C). This will lay foundation and pave the way for advocacy work with legislative bodies

and constituents to reform the current law and adopt forbidding the FGM/C which significantly affects rural women and girls' welfare. Constitutionally and legally women have been guaranteed equal rights in political participation to run for election at all levels, Sudan's constitution chapter 32. Women have been given 25% quota in the Sudan parliament as well as at the state and locality governance, constituency and legislature bodies. This has been fully implemented since 1990s and contributed to politically empower women including rural women at the community governance structures. Particularly women political leaders at the rural areas and grass root level have the opportunity to meaningfully participate in decision making process related to the issues directly affect the wellbeing of rural women and girls at their communities. In addition, the government of Sudan has formed a unit in the Ministry of Social Welfare that is responsible for the women and family issues to alleviate the negative impact of war on women and girls in strong coordination with NGOs and UN agencies. The Ministry of Social Welfare has also formed additional unit that particularly responsible for supporting women empowerment. In 2005, the government of Sudan has formed states committees and approved a national work plan for ending the GBV issues and incidents in the conflict areas, also in close coordination between government authorities, NGOs and UN agencies. It is worth mentioning that there is growing understanding and enlightenment among the formal and official circles regarding the issue of women empowerment and gender equality. This creates enabling environment and unique opportunity to work together using deliver as one approach to support women empowerment and equality in rural areas of Sudan.
