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Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,  
political, economic, social and cultural rights,  
including the right to development

## Written statement\* submitted by Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights Association, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is  
circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[04 June 2020]

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\* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.

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## **The increasing cases of domestic violence against women in light of the COVID-19 pandemic**

### **Preamble**

In light of the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and the global economic fallout, and as more countries enforce lockdown and curfew, a dramatic increase has been reported in recorded cases of violence against women and domestic violence. Therefore, Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights calls on governments to ensure making prevention and redress of gender-based violence a key part of their national response plans to combat the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences. Maat would like to stress again on the need to empower women and help them so that they could seek support, especially since there are no specific figures provided about women and girls exposure to violence due to the home-based quarantine in most countries of the world. It is worth noting that the epidemic strain on women is extreme, as women and vulnerable groups bear the brunt of disaster impacts and crises around the world. Health workers, nurses and cleaning ladies are at the frontlines in the fight against the novel COVID-19. Moreover, the responsibility of caring for families and patients lies within women. Although men seem harder hit by the virus than women, the epidemic will cause more suffering for women at various levels, according to global figures.

Maat submits this intervention to indicate the alarming growth of domestic violence against women in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, and to present examples of laudable countries where concrete steps have been taken to combat all forms of domestic violence against women, as well as to address other international models in which the rates of domestic violence against women have increased recently. This calls for putting international pressure on all countries to take steps that reduce women suffering. Again, Maat calls on the countries which national legislation contains no provisions about domestic violence law to study the issue and submit a project proposal to their respective legislative bodies criminalizing all forms of violence in general, and domestic violence in particular, due to its detrimental impacts on the physical and psychological health of women and children alike.

### **Domestic violence escalated as a global phenomenon in light of the COVID-19 pandemic**

Domestic violence around the world has reached a dangerous stage of escalation, with recent reports indicating the increasing number of cases of domestic violence against women and girls in various parts of the world, in light of the global lockdown measures enforced by several countries to slow the spread of COVID-19. This has encouraged the United Nations to take an urgent action to combat this escalation. Earlier this month, António Guterres, the ninth Secretary-General of the United Nations, made a public statement, in which he urged governments to "put women's safety first as they respond to the pandemic". His message was accompanied by a set of recommendations, including that governments must increase "investing in electronic services and civil society organizations", "declare shelters (for women) as essential services", and continue pursuing aggressors and detain individuals convicted of violence against women.

In the first week of France's COVID-19 lockdown, domestic violence across the country have reportedly jumped by more than 30%, which prompted the authorities to put a number of measures in place to make it easier for victims to report such abuses. Similar cases were reported in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Spain, the United States of America and other countries. And in the Arab world, Lebanon was the first country to raise the alarm on rising domestic violence in light of the COVID-19 outbreak. The Internal Security Forces stated that the domestic violence hotline had a surge of callers since the lockdown began in March, compared to the same period last year.

In a related context, the rates of domestic violence against women in the Occupied Palestinian Territory have surged amid the outbreak of the COVID-19, and 4 women have been reportedly killed since mid-March 2020. According to the country's official media outlets, Israel has seen a 16% increase in domestic abuse cases. During the last week of April 2020,

various care centres received (222) calls from women reporting family violence, compared to 191 calls in March 2020. Italy, on the other hand, has seen a sharp fall in official reports of domestic violence, as the number of reports to police of domestic abuse dropped to 652 in the first 22 days of March, when Italy went into lockdown, from 1,157 in the same period of 2019. Maat is concerned that forced quarantines in homes made it more difficult for victims to seek help and ask for support.

In the same framework, Turkish official data revealed that domestic violence in Istanbul have seen a 38.2 percent increase when compared to last year. There were 1,804 domestic violence incidents in Istanbul in March 2019. The number of domestic abuse incidents increased to 2,493. During only the last month, police statistics recorded an average of 80 domestic violence incidents per day in the city, and Turkish media have reported that 18 women in the country were killed as a result of violence during the first 15 days after the beginning of the forced quarantines.

### **Protecting women from domestic violence in light of the COVID-19 pandemic**

In Tunisia, which passed in 2017 a comprehensive law to protect women from violence, the authorities announced the launch of a free 24-hour free hotline to receive complaints about domestic violence during the quarantines, and promoted this hotline through various media. The measure was announced in the wake of the statement made by Asma al-Suhairi, the Minister of Women, Family, Children and Seniors, in which she reported the registration of forty reports of women who had experienced violence during the first week of quarantine, compared to seven during the same period last year.

In this regard, Maat for Peace urges all countries and governments to make prevention and redress of gender-based violence a key part of their COVID-19 national response plans. This could be realized through intensifying public awareness campaigns, and working to target the youth and men in these campaigns, as well as ensuring the availability of all services and products needed by women on online platforms and social media, and working to find safe ways for women to seek appropriate support, without jeopardizing their lives, as well as the need to establish Emergency systems in more than one place to quickly respond and receive a complaint without notifying the aggressor that someone tried to report it, and to protect the abused woman from violence again, and the importance of ensuring that judicial systems continue to prosecute the aggressors, all of this while working to increase investment in electronic services, and work to provide appropriate financial support to civil society organizations, so that they could help governments tackle domestic violence amid the breakout of COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Recommendations**

- Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights urges governments to expedite the inclusion of the file of domestic violence on its agenda as a pressing issue and to be listed in its priorities to find quick and effective solutions to reduce family violence in light of the current crisis of COVID-19 and the forced quarantine, and to develop an effective socio-economic plan that contributes to getting out of the crisis that aggressors use to justify violence against females, with the need to provide women with safe shelters.
- Maat also calls for accelerating judicial procedures, tightening the penalties on the aggressors and not tolerating them under any pretext related to the current health crisis or others, and it appeals to all governments to provide hotlines working on a 24-hour basis to receive all domestic violence complaints.