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Statement submitted by the Working Women Association, 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 annex is being issued without formal editing.



Statement

The Working Women Association

The Working Women Association is a Sudanese civil society organization that aims at professional and intellectual development and economic empowerment for working women. Its members include some 350,000 women workers in the public and private sectors, who make up 67 per cent of Government sector workers and 80 per cent of education sector workers.

The Association has contributed to numerous projects on social protection, access to public services, empowerment of working women and gender equality.

The Association has launched a number of programmes to enhance health and reproductive services, foster a healthy community and realize sustainable development, including the following:

“Health revolution” programmes

The Association has implemented a “midwife for every village” project as part of its overall maternal and child health strategy and plans. In March 2008, the first forum for women health sector workers was held in collaboration with the Ministry of Health under the slogan “reducing maternal mortality before, during and after childbirth”. Several papers were presented, including a paper on the role of women doctors in sustainable development. Some 250 midwives graduated.

The Association began training midwives in response to the high maternal mortality rate, which, according to a 1999 survey, stood at 509 deaths per 100,000 births. As 85 per cent of births are attended by midwives, it was clear that there was a need for skill upgrades and an improvement in standards for services for normal pregnancies (without complications), obstetrics, postnatal care, newborn care, and diagnosis of abnormal and emergency situations involving mothers and newborns during pregnancy, delivery and the post-partum period, and referral to hospitals for the necessary care.

The primary health care project

This project was a response to an increase in malaria cases, which was attributable to inadequate services for large numbers of rural citizens, lack of clean water in certain areas, malnutrition, the spread of disease and poor health education. The project aims to improve the environment, raise awareness of proper nutrition, immunize children against diseases, treat patients, provide essential medications and offer health education to citizens.

The reproductive health project

This project focuses on the full physical, mental and social well-being of individuals when it comes to reproductive and gynaecological matters. The programme raises awareness of the importance of health care before marriage and works to counter harmful customs (such as female genital cutting), combat sexually transmitted diseases, diagnose infertility and identify its causes, and provide family planning services and health care to young adults and adolescents.

The maternal safety project

This project was a response to high maternal mortality rates and high neonatal mortality rates. The project recognizes the importance of proper nutrition for pregnant women, anti-smoking campaigns, tetanus vaccinations, periodic medical check-ups,

adequate post-partum rest, breastfeeding (particularly for newborns) and post-partum health check-ups.

The project seeks to promote the use of technology, particularly information and communications technology, to empower working women.

Information technology is a broad area that includes handling and management of information with computer software, particularly in large organizations, so that it can be converted, stored, protected, managed, transferred and retrieved as necessary.

The concept of empowerment involves changing power relations and providing opportunities for individuals to take the initiative, make decisions and gain more control over their lives. It also means that social, economic and political systems must give up some authority in order to allow individuals and marginalized groups to participate in decision-making and play an effective role in society.

Information and communications technology greatly helps to disseminate information that can promote women's economic opportunities, especially for working women. Smartphones, for example, can be used to access information that can be widely utilized.

The Association has worked to empower women through a project to increase ownership of electronic devices and computers, disseminate digital literacy, and inform women of the benefits of electronic payments, thereby advancing the State's e-government plans.

With respect to access to public services and sustainable infrastructure in the service of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, the Association has sponsored the following projects throughout the Sudan:

- The Association has signed memorandums of understanding with the Savings Bank and Workers' Microfinance Company to finance individual and collective manufacturing projects for working women. A total of 15,485 manufacturing projects have received 15,992,477 pounds, and the project is still underway.
- The Association signed a memorandum of understanding with the Workers' Microfinance Company to train working women in household agriculture, utilizing household space for the cultivation of safe, chemical-free food. It also takes advantage of unused space in schools for vegetable cultivation.
- The Association has offered baking courses in partnership with Sayga Food Industries Company for 39,323 working women.
- The Association's food industry courses have trained some 1,500 working women how to prepare various dishes by replacing meat with vegetables.
- The Association organized several recycling training sessions, showing how to reduce waste and make efficient use of discarded items.
- Through the Economic Secretariat, the Association created charity markets to provide consumer goods at official, subsidized prices with the aim of lessening economic burdens.
- The Economic Secretariat oversees Eid fairs at various branches.
- The Economic Secretariat, in cooperation with municipalities in Khartoum State and federal branches, has opened retail outlets for sale of merchandise at wholesale prices. That was made possible through agreements with factories and companies to sell their products directly to working women at their places of work.

- The Secretariat has followed up the implementation of a presidential directive regarding oversight of workplace food conglomerates to ensure reasonable prices for workers.
- The Association has held forums for women in various occupational sectors. Professional development recommendations were put forward by the Health Forum (which recommended a health campaign), the Agricultural Forum and the Economic Forum. Forums were also held for women working in the informal sector with the goal of integrating them into the development process and protecting their rights. Women working in the informal sector were also included in the Association's memorandums on microfinance activities.
- The Association has launched projects for the purchase of goods, such as electrical appliances and household furniture, in instalments, saving time and effort for working women. The Secretariat provided gas canisters at official prices through various companies. The Association also holds annual sales of school uniforms and backpacks for workers' children. It is working to transfer ownership of the means of production, and has been able to transfer ownership of 10,781 productive projects.
- The Association has provided children's meals to kindergartens, which have been approved by the Sudanese Standards and Metrology Organization, to ensure adequate nutrition for women workers' children in nursery schools, and has prepared breakfasts for elementary school students.
- The Association promotes social solidarity by supporting various convoys: annual winter clothing convoys to remote areas; convoys to mitigate the adverse impacts of torrential rains and floods in the various states of the Sudan; annual school support convoys; and convoys to facilitate voluntary return to states, which provide food and cooking devices.
- The Secretariat has published pamphlets on health, religious and legal matters.
- The Association has made an effective contribution to providing Ramadan packages free of charge to workers from vulnerable groups, and at reasonable cost in most other cases.
- It has contributed to social networking programmes at various events for women civil service pensioners by providing material and in-kind support.
- The Association, in partnership with the Ministry of the Interior, has participated in 77 lectures on addiction treatment and the dangers of narcotics.
- Women civil service pensioners have been provided with material support.
- There is a support and relief project for displaced families in South Kordofan State.
- There are disaster prevention and environment improvement projects in various states.
- There is a textbook project in South Kordofan State.
- There is a clothing distribution project for displaced women in the relevant states.
- There have been convoys sent to South Kordofan State for the voluntary return programmes.
- Educational platforms have been organized where specialists address issues of the day from an analytical perspective, including issues such as migrant workers, changing the Sudan's time zone, and a Charter for the Muslim Family.

- The Secretariat has conducted awareness campaigns, with training sessions, on regular breast examinations and referral of cases to treatment centres. This programme takes place in October each year.
- The Secretariat, in an effort to foster the development of women workers, has launched free training internships. It has also sent them on training trips in Turkey, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia and Egypt, and to two free training sessions in China on combating poverty (Goal 1 of the Sustainable Development Goals) as part of the Association's goal of fostering international connections and skill acquisition.
- The Association attaches importance to legislation and human rights, educating working women on labour law and the status and rights of women according to international conventions. This is in order to empower working women, make them aware of their legal rights and allow them to play a role in social and economic change through equal opportunity, removal of obstacles and the possibility of decent work. To that end, the Secretariat held workshops on the Insurance and Pensions Act, the practice and application of women's rights in labour law, the status of women in international conventions ratified by the Sudan and their state of implementation, and labour law and civil service regulations. In addition, the Association's Legal Counsel provides free legal advice.

Recommendations for empowering women and girls

- Creation and enhancement of partnerships among civil society organizations, regionally and internationally, in order to create opportunities for knowledge transfer and to secure funding for programmes and activities related to the development and empowerment of women and girls.
- Raising awareness among women of laws and international instruments and urging the international community to raise awareness of the importance of ratifying instruments on the empowerment of women and girls.
- Studying the experiences of civil society organizations working to empower women and girls.
- Encouraging women and girls to become involved in development and economic programmes.

The Working Women Association thanks the United Nations and the Commission on the Status of Women for their support of civil society organizations concerned with the empowerment of women in accordance with the international conventions that protect their rights. We also thank the Commission on the Status of Women for organizing events in support of women that have given rise to fruitful exchanges of experiences.
