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peace for the twenty-first century”

Statement submitted by Plataforma Mulheres em Acção, 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

Women's rights in Angola

Women represent 52 per cent of the Angolan population according to the 2014 census (Instituto Nacional de Estatísticos). While significant progress has been made over the past 25 years since the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, the violation of women's rights has been a persistent structural problem, which has far-reaching consequences on the lives of women, their families, and the community as a whole. The main issues identified in this review are:

1. Unemployment. The 2014 census revealed an unemployment rate of 65.9 per cent among women aged 15–64 and 53.4 per cent among their male counterparts, a difference of 12.5 per cent. The informal sector is a sustenance refuge for more than 80 per cent of women, yet the government implemented Operation Resgate in 2018, which was aimed at reducing the sale of goods in undesignated places. While the informal sector should operate within the confines of the law, the government should create viable programs for women within this sector, including improved access to loans and skills training. Additionally, government should create economic alternatives for women who, often due to limited educational opportunities and systemic discrimination, fail to secure formal jobs. Moreover, government should obligate law enforcement agents to practice restraint and respect for the dignity of women during execution of their duties.

2. Education. The illiteracy level for women aged 15–24 is 33 per cent, while 16 per cent of men are illiterate, according to the 2014 national census. Twenty-two per cent of girls aged 12–17 are out of school compared to 16 per cent of their male counterparts, based on the 2018 research, *A Child in Angola: A Multi-dimensional Analysis of Infant Poverty* by the Government of Angola, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and the National Statistics Institute, owing to the continued existence of child marriage within the Angolan society, adolescent pregnancies, and puberty. Menstruation is an unavoidable biological process among women of child bearing age. However, absence of running water in more than 60 per cent of government schools, poor sanitation in school lavatories, and high costs of feminine personal care products limit girls' ability to hygienically manage their menstruation. Efforts should be put in place to ensure that sanitary conditions at schools are improved and sanitary ware is more accessible.

3. Adolescent pregnancies. The high levels of teenage pregnancies in Angola are a growing public health concern. Out of every 1,000 girls, 153 have children before the age of 18, representing 15.3 per cent of the adolescent population, which is the highest rate in Southern Africa, according to the Southern Africa Gender Protocol Alliance Mapping of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights Policies and Laws (2018). Based on the 2015–2016 Angolan Multi Indicator Health Survey in the diamond rich Lunda Sul province, 59.79 per cent of girls fall pregnant before the age of 18, which is the highest rate in the country. The government should develop an adolescent sexual and reproductive health and rights policy that includes comprehensive sexuality education in the school curriculum. Moreover, access to information should be coupled with equal access to youth-friendly age-appropriate services.

4. Child Marriage. Child marriage is both a cause and an impact of early pregnancies. Care USA (2016) rates Angola 10 out of 26 countries where child marriages surpass the level of enrollment in secondary schools. One of the reasons is the existence of Article 24 of the Family Code which permits marriage for girls and boys at 15 and 16 years of age, respectively, with authorization from their guardians

under vaguely defined circumstances. This contradicts Article 24 of the Constitution of the Republic of Angola where the age of majority is set at 18. We recommend that the state observes this violation of girls' rights and gender discrimination by repealing the exception in Article 24 of the Family Code. The government should follow examples from other African countries, such as Mozambique, whose laws call for the elimination of child marriage internationally. The government should go even further and criminalize this horrendous act.

5. Access to voluntary and rights-based contraception. In Angola, only 17 per cent of women use modern contraceptives, according to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) (2019). While public hospitals offer free family planning counselling and at least four contraceptive methods, women's rights groups note that traditional beliefs that women should have many children and religious doctrines reduce women's use of contraceptives. Moreover, a lack of professionalism among health workers, particularly in peripheral communities, limit the use of contraceptives. Of equal concern, despite having a high rate of teenage pregnancies (153 births per 1000 adolescents) and high fertility rates (6.3 per woman, according to the 2014 National Census) adolescent girls are legally restricted from accessing contraceptives before the age of 18. Government should increase access to contraceptives by deliberately mapping gaps in contraceptive use and developing national campaigns. Limited access to contraceptives increases the risks of unsafe abortions, unwanted pregnancies, and maternal mortality.

6. Violence against women and girls. Despite enacting a law in 2011 against domestic violence and a Presidentially decreed National Policy for Gender Equality and Equity in 2013 (which includes a section on domestic violence), Angola continues to experience high cases of gender-based violence, with INE reporting that 31.7 per cent of women aged 15–49 experienced some form of domestic violence in their lifetime. This can be attributed to social norms and expectations that subjugate women, gaps in the implementation of laws (including failure to provide psychosocial and judicial support and temporary shelter for survivors), limited consultation with civil society organizations in the formulation of policies, and inadequate resources and funding for gender based violence interventions. It is recommended that the Angolan government develops a more inclusive strategic plan to combat domestic violence, severely penalize offenders, and reinforce implementation of the domestic violence law by improving police services and providing gender-based personalized care and health and social care services for victims of sexual abuse.

7. Corporate responsibility of companies in the extractive industries and the violation of women's rights. In some locations, such as Icolo and Bengo, Huila and Lunda, and Sul and Norte, there is extraction of natural resources with violation of human rights (including environmental and women's rights) recorded in areas. Impacted populations live with soil erosion due to exploitation of sand for construction, consumption of contaminated water leading to serious public health problems (dermatology, blood urine, and consecutive abortions), and sexual exploitation of women and girls. The state is urged to improve the supervision of companies and influence corporate responsibility for the contribution of companies in the development of areas located in extractive industry zones.

8. Women and the environment. Climate change in the southern provinces of Angola led to a severe drought. It directly affects women and girls, resulting in transactional sex for survival. Moreover, tree felling in the provinces of Cuando Cubango and Moxico has led to deforestation, which contributes to climate change and affects communities, particularly women and children. Based on Law 6/17 of 24 January Forest Law, Wild Fauna and Land Conservation, the State should promote "the defense and conservation of natural resources, guiding their exploitation and exploitation throughout the community". Additionally, inclusive, community-driven

strategies should be developed to increase climate change resilience and adaptation, particularly in rural communities.

9. Inadequate financial resources in the national budget for the social sector affecting women and girls, particularly in the areas of education and sexual and reproductive health (including HIV/AIDS). Of particular concern are the rates of HIV/AIDS infection and adolescent pregnancy and the number of unregistered children. 330,000 people are HIV positive in Angola, 190,000 of whom are women (Instituto Nacional de Luta contra HIV/SIDA, 2019). Reproductive rights comprise the basic right of every individual to freely and responsibly decide on the number, spacing, and opportunity to have children. It also ensure the right of individuals to have the information and the means to make decisions free from discrimination, coercion or violence, and that men and women share equal responsibility in raising their children.

In light of this, the government is encouraged to protect and promote the right to life, the highest standards of health, privacy, information and equality, and non-discrimination by promoting rights-based contraceptive use, ensuring quality and affordable public health services, and increasing the budgetary allocation to the sector.

10. Gender mainstreaming in all sectors. It is also recommended that the government reinforce gender mainstreaming in all sectors, including in the statistics and planning sector to ensure that the budgeting priorities are reflective of women's needs.
