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

**Joint written statement* submitted by the International
Organization for the Elimination of All Forms of Racial
Discrimination (EAFORD), the Arab Organization for
Human Rights, non-governmental organizations in special
consultative status, the International Educational
Development, Inc. , the World Peace Council, non-
governmental organizations on the roster**

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

[16 May 2017]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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Conditions of Women in Iraq, Yemen and the Syrian Arab Republic*

Introduction

In conflict and post-conflict countries, women and girls suffer heavily from the consequences of the fighting. In war-torn areas, in fact, women are increasingly vulnerable to poverty, they are marginalised and neglected, they suffer for the lack of adequate health care systems and they are subjected to violence and abuses. Such abuses include rape, trafficking, sexual violence, gender-based violence, exploitation and psychological violence. Moreover, in conflict situations, rape is often used as war-tactic: such heinous technique has the power to subjugate entire communities, to affect societies at their very core and to instil fear in the population.

In war-times, women are often forced to leave their homes and to embark in perilous journeys either within or outside the countries, often ending up in refugee's camps or makeshift shelters. In such camps, women face hardships and difficult situations linked to their gender, particularly linked to health conditions and access to information and supplies.

Although they account for the majority of conflict-related civilian casualties and for 49% of the entire refugees' population, and despite the disproportionate impact conflict has on their enjoyment of fundamental human rights and basic freedoms, women continue to be underrepresented, marginalised and excluded in the decision-making and in the reparation processes. With Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) the UN recognised that "civilians, particularly women and children, account for the vast majority of those adversely affected by armed conflict, including as refugees and internally displaced persons, and increasingly are targeted by combatants and armed element,"¹ and reaffirmed the need to increase women's role in decision-making related to conflict prevention and resolution.

However, seventeen years later, women and girls continue to suffer the same abuses, and the situation in Iraq, in the Syrian Arab Republic, and in Yemen are among the most concerning.

Iraq

The United States of America-led invasion of Iraq of 2003 had dramatic consequences on the entire political and social apparatus of the country and changed the legal framework concerning the personal status of women – thus giving men and religious authorities the primacy over women and girls.

Since then, the conditions and the status of women have further deteriorated and the emergence and quick spread of the Islamic States across some areas of Iraq has dramatically exacerbated the situation. The advance of ISIS is causing death and devastation and has provoked one of the largest waves of displacement of the last decade.

In 2016 alone, more than one million people were internally displaced – thus bringing the number of IDPs registered since 2014 to 3.2 million. To date, over 650,000 people remain strained in inadequate shelter arrangements such as informal settlements and poor makeshift buildings².

As it often happens, the impact of displacement and the conditions in the camps are overly affecting women and girls who, nevertheless, have been neglected in the overall humanitarian response. Women are deeply affected by the conflict, are marginalised and are not adequately included in the reparation and reconstruction process.

¹ *Security Council, Resolution 1325 (2000)*, available at [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1325\(2000\)](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1325(2000))

² *Humanitarian Bulletin Iraq*, OCHA, April 2017, available at http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/OCHA%20Iraq%20Humanitarian%20Bulletin%20%28April%202017%29_Final.pdf

The advance of the Islamic State and of the Shia militias is creating a dangerous environment for women and girls. The breakdown of law and order and the collapse of the existing infrastructures has put women at high risk of being abducted, trafficked, subjected to sexual violence, forced to marry their assaulters, stoned to death, tortured, and arbitrarily killed. In such areas access of international monitors and humanitarian aid is restrained. Therefore, accurate statistics on the number of women forced to live under these conditions are almost impossible to obtain.

Also women living in refugee's camps are at risk of experiencing some sort of gender-based violence and discrimination, and the increasing number of internally displaced persons arriving in the camps is further complicating the task of identifying and addressing the different and specific needs of women and girls. As such, in addition to suffering abuses and violence, they have restrained access to basic health supplies and livelihood items. Moreover, the lack of gender-sensitive medical care is gravely affecting women's and girls' health and wellbeing, and is forcing thousands of women to give birth in unsafe and unsanitary conditions – thus putting their lives and the life of their baby at risk.

The growing crisis and the recent wave of displacement provoked by the battle for the “liberation” of Mosul are putting a huge burden on already stretched health care facilities and on the existing camps. Adequate funds, trained personnel and gender-based approaches are needed to alleviate the suffering of Iraqi women and girls.

Syrian Arab Republic

The six-year-long Syrian conflict has had – and continues to have – a devastating impact on the Syrian society. The destruction of infrastructures, the appalling number of casualties, the use of prohibited weapons (i.e. chemical weapons) and the brutal and inhuman treatment to which detainees and civilians are subjected have provoked an unprecedented humanitarian crisis that has caused one of the biggest waves of IDPs and refugees of the last decades.

The endless conflict has dramatically affected the enjoyment of fundamental rights and basic freedoms of the Syrian population, and has overly affected the safety of women and girls of all ages. While the Syrian judicial and legal system in place before the beginning of the war already included discriminatory provisions against women, the conflict has caused a dramatic worsening of their conditions.

Syrian women face threats, violence and discrimination both within and outside the country. Those who have managed to flee their homes, often end up in IDPs and refugees' camps where health care conditions do not meet the adequate standards. For instance, the lack of medical facilities and health care supplies has forced over 200,000 to give birth in unsafe conditions³. Many others are denied necessary reproductive health access, as well as treatment specific to those victimized by gender-based violence

Furthermore, it is believed that both in camps and outside camps, women face an incredibly high risk of sexual harassment and sexual violence perpetrated by governmental forces and terrorist groups. Allegedly, security forces often rape and abuse women in detention, during interrogatories and at checkpoints, while armed groups engage in sexual violence and rape, they sell women and girls, they promote sexual enslavement, and abuse them in any possible way.

While the international community – led by the United Nations – is providing funds and basic supplies to the civilian population and is assisting in the creation of IDPs and refugee's camps, the humanitarian response has failed to provide women and girls with the adequate redress and protection.

Yemen

Yemen, the poorest country in the Arab region, has always suffered problems linked to food insecurity and economic hardships. Yet, since the outset of the conflict in 2014 the situation has further worsened, and women and girls are being

³ 2017 *Humanitarian needs overview, Syrian Arab Republic*, UNOCHA Report, December 2016, available at https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/system/files/documents/files/2017_syria_hno_2.pdf

overly affected by the violence of the fighting and by the repercussions of the famine and the lack of adequate health care facilities and supplies.

The conflict initiated in 2014 between the internationally recognized Government of Yemen and armed Houthi rebels has ravaged the already fragile country, and the situation has worsened following the illegitimate intervention of external actors and the violent actions of rebel groups.

According to UNICEF, today four in five Yemenis need some type of humanitarian assistance, 28 million people are short of food, 17 million are food insecure, and 14.4 million have no access to drinking water and sanitation. Furthermore, since September 2014, 7,600 people have been killed, 42,000 injured, over 2 million people are internally displaced, and more than 180,000 civilians have fled the country⁴.

As it often happens, women and girls are disproportionately affected by the crisis, in particular because they are restricted or denied access to resources, livelihood supplies and basic health care items, and because they continue to be marginalised and neglected by the society and the humanitarian response. Not having access to valuable information, women often have poor hygienic conditions and, therefore, are at higher risk of contracting preventable and curable disease as well as of carrying pregnancies in unsafe and perilous ways.

Furthermore, the ongoing conflict and the worsening crisis are forcing thousands of Yemenis to flee their homes. When internally displaced or when trying to leave the country, women and girls are particularly vulnerable to abduction, attacks, trafficking, gender-based violence, drowning, exploitation and sexual assault.

Moreover, the heinous actions of the al-Houthi militias are further destabilising the situation and putting a strain on the Yemeni communities. The rebel groups, in fact, continuously recruit children for armed conflict – thus deeply affecting families and communities – and threaten the civilian population with physical and psychological violence.

However, the conflict has only exacerbated an already concerning situation. In fact, women in Yemen faced and continue to face severe discrimination in law and in practice. Abuses and discrimination include⁵:

- Lack of legal protection which leaves them exposed to gender-based violence, domestic violence and sexual violence;
- Forced and early marriage;
- Physical and psychological abuses, even within the family;
- Deprivation of education;
- Sexual harassment and violence;
- Restriction and control over freedom of movement;
- Denial of inheritance and child custody;
- Female genital mutilation conducted in unsanitary conditions;
- Forced pregnancy;
- Exclusion from private and public decision-making; and
- Deprivation of health care and livelihood assistance.

Recommendations:

In light of the above, we, NGOs Signatories to this statement recommend to the United Nations and its relevant bodies to:

⁴ *Yemen, Humanitarian Situation Report*, UNICEF, available at https://www.unicef.org/yemen/YEM_sirteps_Feb2017.pdf

⁵ *New Gender Alert highlights need to support women and girls in the humanitarian response in Yemen*, UN Women, available at <http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2015/7/gender-alert-yemen#sthash.81C1LGIZ.dpuf>

- Urge the concerned governments to provide immediate redress to victims of sexual and gender-based violence, including immediate access to legal remedies to hold perpetrators accountable and provision of access to appropriate, gender-sensitive medical care
- Ensure that all women, including those living in rural areas, in besieged or hard-to-reach areas, and in refugee camps can access appropriate health care, including reproductive care
- Pressure all member States to halt the devastating conflicts that are ravaging the aforementioned countries and to conduct anti-terrorism campaigns within the appropriate legal frameworks – thus reducing the impact on civilians, in particular women and girls; and
- Take the necessary steps to enhance the protection of IDPs and refugees living in camps and establish appropriate measures to ensure the safety of women and girls living in such camps.

*Geneva International Centre for Justice (GICJ), The Arab Lawyers Association- UK, Human Rights Defenders (HRD), The Brussels Tribunal, Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor, Association of Humanitarian Lawyers (AHL), The Iraqi Commission for Human Rights (ICHR), Association of Human Rights Defenders in Iraq (AHRD), Alliance to Renew Co-operation among Humankind, General Federation of Iraqi Women (GFIW), Organisation for Justice & Democracy in Iraq (OJDI), Women Will Association (WWA), The Iraqi Centre for Human Rights, The International League of Iraqi Academics (ILIA), Organization for Widows and Orphans (OWO), International Anti-Occupation Network (IAON), NGOs without consultative status, also share the views expressed in this statement.