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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 United Nations Watch, 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.

[15 February 2010]

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

Urgent need to protect the economic, social and cultural rights of women

United Nations Watch reminds all Member and Observer States of the Human Rights Council of their obligation to respect the economic, social and cultural rights of women. The right to health, the right to an education and the right to work are some of the basic rights guaranteed under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

Regrettably, when it comes to the treatment of women, these rights are violated by many countries that have pledged to respect them as signatories to the ICESCR or as members of the Human Rights Council.

There are many examples of widespread impunity for such violations.¹

In this regard, United Nations Watch wishes to remind the Islamic Republic of Iran of its obligations under the ICESCR to respect the right to health.

Following the 1979 revolution, the Islamic Republic of Iran lowered the legal age of marriage for females from fifteen to nine. In 2002, it was raised to thirteen. In practice, girls as young as nine can be forced by their fathers into marriages,² having their first child at the age of twelve or thirteen.³ When gynecologists detect sexually transmitted infections, they will often hide the information, fearing the reaction of the patient's husband.⁴ Iran's policies and actions in this regard breach Section 21 of General Comment Fourteen on the Right to Health.

United Nations Watch calls on the Islamic Republic of Iran to ratify the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), without reservations. United Nations Watch further urges the government of Iran to provide equal medical care for men and women, and to raise the legal age of marriage for women from thirteen to eighteen.

Second, United Nations Watch reminds Pakistan of its obligations to guarantee the economic, social and cultural rights of women.

Regarding the right to education, it was reported last year that Islamic extremism in certain Pakistani regions led to the closure of over 900 schools in Pakistan, denying 125,000 young women the opportunity to complete their education.⁵

The government is obliged not to grant authority over education to elements that egregiously deny equal rights for women. It is wholly unacceptable that the female literacy rate in Pakistan stands at only 36 percent, far lower than the figure for males.

¹ See generally, UN Watch human rights reports at <http://www.unwatch.org>.

² "Starting at home, Iran's women fight for rights," New York Times, February 12, 2009, at <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/13/world/middleeast/13iran.html>.

³ Hajar Kadivar, "Overseas Medical Elective Assessment: Primary Health Care and Family Planning in the Islamic Republic of Iran," November 16, 2009, at http://www.usc.edu/schools/medicine/school/offices/educational_affairs/global_health/assets/H_Kadivar_Iran.doc.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ "Taliban Restrict Women's Education in Pakistan," The Independent, January 18, 2009, at <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/taliban-restrict-womens-education-in-pakistan-1419199.html>.

Regarding the right to work, the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report ranks Pakistan as the third lowest in gender equality.⁶ Women compose 34 percent of Pakistan's total labor force, and suffer from an unemployment rate of 16 percent. By comparison, the male unemployment rate is 6 percent. Women occupy only nine percent of all urban, non-agricultural occupations, meaning that they are relegated to rural and agricultural work, with the possibility for upward mobility severely limited.

Of the 128 countries evaluated in the WEF report, Pakistan ranked 97th in terms of wage equality for similar work. United Nations Watch urges Pakistan to adhere to Article 7 of the ICESCR, and to take note specifically of section a(i), which guarantees “fair wages and equal remuneration for work of equal value” without distinction of any kind, in particular, “women being guaranteed conditions of work not inferior to those enjoyed by men, with equal pay for equal work.”

In order to comply with its obligations to protect economic, social and cultural rights, United Nations Watch calls on Pakistan to immediately implement the recommendations of the 2008 Report of the Working Group of the Universal Periodic Review of Pakistan.

To further comply with its obligations to protect economic, social and cultural rights, United Nations Watch calls on Pakistan to end barriers associated with deep-rooted tribal and traditional mindsets with regards to women's rights; end stereotypes and implement constitutional and legal guarantees to ensure that all human rights of women are safeguarded throughout its territory; ensure punishment for perpetrators of all violence against women; and thoroughly investigate and punish members and leaders of illegal jirgas for their calls to violence against women.

Pakistan must also take concrete steps to align the prohibition of discrimination with the prohibition contained in the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women; follow up on the recommendation of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women to withdraw its declaration to the effect that obligations pursuant to CEDAW are subject to the Constitution; and undertake a comprehensive review and revision of all discriminatory legislation in order to achieve compliance with its obligations under CEDAW.

To further comply with its obligations to protect economic, social and cultural rights, Pakistan must act immediately to prevent early and forced marriage and to recognize in its legislation rape within marriage.

Pakistan must end impunity for crimes of honour killings, acid attacks and forced marriages. It must train police and other authorities to deal appropriately and effectively with victims of sexual assault and other violence against women, ensure victims' access to justice and improve support services such as shelters and burn units for women.

Finally, United Nations Watch reminds all members of the Human Rights Council that they must set an example for others in the promotion and protection of all rights. In this regard, for example, Saudi Arabia, as a member of the Council, must finally put an end to its systematic discrimination of women, which threatens the full enjoyment of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural.

While Saudi Arabia has ratified CEDAW, United Nations Watch expresses its grave concern that Saudi Arabia is, in far too many areas, failing to respect its provisions, as the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women found during its 2008

⁶ World Economic Forum, “The Global Gender Gap Report 2007,” at <http://www.weforum.org/pdf/gendergap/rankings2007.pdf>.

review of Saudi Arabia.⁷ United Nations Watch urges Saudi Arabia to implement the Committee's findings.

Saudi Arabia must end the practice of "male guardianship," which restricts a woman's freedom of movement and threatens the full enjoyment of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural. Comprehensive measures must be taken to curtail this practice.

Saudi Arabia must finally enact a definition of gender equality to encompass equal rights for men and women, as opposed to "similar" or "harmonious" rights. There cannot be a policy of "separate but equal."

Saudi Arabia must finally end impunity for violence against women, which must be prosecuted. Concrete legal measures must be taken to reduce domestic violence.

In conclusion, United Nations Watch reminds all States of their obligations to promote and protect all human rights, civil and political, economic, social and cultural, of both men and women, citizen and non-citizen alike.

⁷ Concluding comments of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, at http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cedaw/docs/CEDAW.C.SAU.CO.2_en.pdf.