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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 the Network of Women's Non-governmental Organizations in the Islamic Republic of Iran, 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.

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Gender and smoking

Introduction: The report of the Women's Unit affiliated to the Iranian Anti-Tobacco Association for presenting to the United Nations

The health of women, especially young women, as future mothers, and their effective role in the health of children has a major impact on the health of the community. If the issues affecting women's health are ignored, there will be irreparable harm to women and, consequently, to society.

Tobacco is the biggest preventable cause of mortality in the world. According to the report published in the WHO's Tobacco Atlas, only in 2016, tobacco has caused the death of more than 7.1 million people, of whom 2 million were female. Women are the biggest victims of the tobacco industry, whether they themselves smoke or being exposed to environmental tobacco smoke.

In recent decades, according to scientific studies and evidence, the reduction in the age of smoking onset and the rise in tobacco use - especially hookah - in women have been much higher compared to men. Given the fact that the genders are not so different regarding health harms, women - in addition to the general risks of tobacco use - are also at risk for specific factors related to their gender, and this increases the importance of the issue.

In Iranian society, the negative impact of such behaviors on Iranian women is greater than that of men and has certain social and cultural implications. So, the pathology of this topic should be different, and women's issues should be examined independently of men's issues. According to the WHO's recommendations, in order to explore the factors influencing the smoking onset, we should consider the impact of gender more accurately, because tobacco consumption is a behavior that relates to people's gender. Indeed, the onset of smoking by women may have different reasons compared to men. Therefore, understanding the factors that affect the onset and continuation of smoking can increase the effectiveness of tobacco control strategies.

The Islamic Republic of Iran has committed to reducing smoking by 30% by 2025 because of high rates of cardiovascular disease. However, on the other hand, cigarette and hookah consumption has increased significantly in adolescents, especially in females.

In agreement with the Millennium Development Goals, the Iranian Anti-Tobacco Association has established the Women's Unit with the goal of empowering women in the field of health. In addition, issues related to smoking by women have been raised as one of the priorities of the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC).

The mission of the Women's Unit is to prevent and control tobacco use in women. The Unit pursues the following goals:

- Research on women and tobacco;
- Supporting scientific research and graduate theses & projects on women and tobacco;
- Conducting conferences and workshops on women and tobacco; and
- Interaction and partnership with governmental and non-governmental organizations in the field of women and tobacco in the forms of contract or memorandum of understanding.

Prevalence of tobacco use

In 2016, the prevalence of smoking in Iranian men and women was 25.16% and 4.01%, respectively. Also, smoking in adolescents aged 13 to 15, especially in girls, has increased significantly. Cigarette smoking in adolescent girls has risen from about 1% to 2.1%, and in adolescent boys has decreased from 5.1% to 4.8%. Currently, 6.6% of adolescent girls aged 13 to 15 have a history of hookah consumption compared to 11.1% of adolescent boys. The trend of hookah use from 2008 to 2012 is presented in the table below. Moreover, the mean of hookah consumption in both genders was 2.89% in 2008 and 3.5% in 2012.

Year	Men (%)	Women (%)
2008	3.45	2.3
2009	3.5	1.6
2010	2.9	2
2012	4.8	2.3

Causes of smoking and their relation to gender

More than 20 years ago, feminist researchers focused on the impact of gender on smoking. This requires attention to the social and cultural norms of smoking in women and the relation between smoking and gender inequality and discrimination.

From a medical viewpoint, tobacco dependence is usually considered as a chronic disease, while from a psychological viewpoint, it is considered a mental illness. In DSM-5 (The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition) smoking has been categorized as 'disorder'. However, the definition of smoking in the fields of biology and medicine, which introduces smoking as a health problem or physical dependence, neglects the social factors effective in smoking.

The medical perspective on smoking represents just a part of reality. This viewpoint does not pay attention to the gender-related factors, such as social norms, identity, and gender relations. Indeed, gender social norms can determine who, how, where, and when one consumes tobacco. Tobacco use with the symbol of a mature man or a woman free from the traditional frameworks can grant a gender identity to tobacco users. Also, tobacco smoking sometimes leads to the formation or continuation of the social relationships between the two genders.

Comprehensive and in-depth studies are needed to understand the causes of smoking in Iranian women; otherwise, we will have an inadequate analysis of this behavior. According to studies in Iran, smoking has various functions for women: social function, hedonistic function, sedative function, identity-granting function, etc.

The causes of smoking among girls are very different, from hobby and recreation to neurological problems and psychological crises. It seems that younger women tend to be smokers because of their curiosity and older women tend to be smokers because of mental problems. Tobacco use by girls may appear to be a resistance to traditional frameworks and taboos that limit women's freedom.

From the perspective of adolescent girls, tobacco smoking can be a symbol of resistance to passive and limited identity and the idea of the traditional woman which is formed and encouraged in school or society. In addition, smoking for some women creates a sense of pleasure and satisfaction with everyday life. Also, smoking can be a way to cope with social pressures, as well as to make pleasure and to eliminate depression.

Using hookah, unlike cigarettes, by Iranian women is not related to any specific occupational or educational level. Since hookah using has less obscenity than cigarettes for Iranian women, the prevalence of hookah use in Iranian women is higher than that of cigarettes. Positive

attitudes, false beliefs about lesser harms of hookah, lower cost of hookah, and more access to hookahs have led to a greater tendency of Iranian women to hookah use. Studies show that Iranian women mainly use a hookah to relieve stress, while Iranian men use it mainly for fun.

The best policy in this regard is to adopt a policy that addresses the causes of women's tendency to tobacco use. For example, why, in spite of similar access, some people have a stronger tendency to smoking. The next step is to choose the best and least costly solution among different solutions.

Hence, the best and least costly solution is to educate and inform girls at risk. It should be noted that the training of this group is a multidimensional measure that requires the cooperation and coordination of various institutions, for example, media, educational centers, Ministry of Education, and medical and health organizations which work for control and prevention of addiction and increasing the motivation of smokers to quit smoking.

The role of women in tobacco control

Given the role of women in family management and their role as a behavioral pattern for children and adolescents, they can play their role better by raising awareness of their families about tobacco harms and second-hand smoke. Women play an important role in preventing tobacco smoke exposure in themselves and their children. Women can encourage their husbands to quit smoking, and even if their husbands do not want to quit smoking, they can reduce the risk of second-hand smoke exposure by preventing cigarette and hookah use in the home. Women can play an important role in informing families through raising awareness about the harms of hookah - as a dangerous instrument, not as harmless fun - and they can play an important role in providing healthy recreation for their children and preventing them from becoming addicted to tobacco.

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