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**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and
to the special session of the General Assembly entitled
“Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace
for the twenty-first century”**

Statement submitted by Al-Hakim Foundation, 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

The Al-Hakim Foundation presents its compliments to all the delegates participating in the 59th session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, held in New York.

In the midst of the dramatically accelerating events that have shaken the world – and in particular the Middle East – over the past year, there has been a clear and serious decline in social and economic stability and security as a result of the unprecedented rise in levels of violence – in all its forms – in addition to the intensification of armed conflict and the absence of peace in a number of countries.

This decline in stability and security, and the significant deterioration in human rights in general that has accompanied it, is having a dangerous effect on the lives of millions of people. In particular, it has a direct impact on the rights and progress achieved thus far by women, given that women are always the first victims of this type of conflict.

Since the publication of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in 1995, efforts have been made by all countries and many organizations to realize the world-wide aims and goals of the Declaration as soon as possible. However, at the same time, women's progress in many Middle Eastern countries has moved at a slower pace than that in western countries, owing to the difficult circumstances of many countries in the region and the challenges that confront women there. This state of affairs has hindered many important efforts to encourage women to participate in politics and education, to empower women economically and to help them to avoid poverty and unemployment. Many civil organizations concerned with women's issues and female empowerment are working towards these goals; the Al-Hakim Foundation is considered to be one of the largest of these organizations in Iraq, and many of its activities and programmes work to empower Iraqi women and to help them to make significant progress toward improving women's education, political participation and economic empowerment.

The traumatic events experienced in the Middle East, and the threat of terrorism in Iraq, have led to an alarming reversal in the progress made by Iraqi women in many areas of the country. Iraqi women living in regions threatened by terrorist attacks are having to deal with a series of increasingly serious challenges, including a lack of security and a complete disregard for human rights and for standards of human dignity. As a result of this, hundreds of thousands of women have been forced to move with their families to safer regions, which nevertheless present their own challenges and dangers, such as sickness, poor services and the incapacity to meet inhabitants' human and economic needs.

Of all these dangerous developments, one challenge calls particularly strongly upon the global human conscience – the abduction, rape and sexual enslavement of women. These crimes affect many women in Iraq, including those from Shia, Shabak, Yazidi and Christian communities. The suffering of women abducted by terrorist organizations demands an immediate and decisive response on the part of the international community, with a view to putting an end to this wide-scale crime against humanity and punishing all those who commit or incite this crime, including television channels and individuals who call for the killing of a given group of people and the abduction of its women in the name of a particular religion or sect.

At the Al-Hakim Foundation, we will continue to make every effort, through our numerous programmes, to support the progress of Iraqi women, to empower them and to help them to improve their legal, social and political status. The Foundation also continues to run a number of national campaigns, such as the Islamic Day against Violence against Women, which was first organized 8 years ago and which has since developed into an ongoing programme to combat violence against women in Iraqi society. The Foundation also continues to make efforts to help families that have been forcibly displaced, and to increase the number of families living in suitable conditions, in which their day-to-day needs and essential healthcare needs can be met.

In conclusion, we would like to reiterate that it is imperative that the United Nations and the international community take prompt and decisive action to put an end to the suffering of Iraqi women at risk of abduction by terrorist organizations. This issue should be made a top priority. We therefore ask all women's and human rights organizations to join the Al-Hakim Foundation in demanding that the perpetrators of this appalling crime, including all those who fund or incite the crime, are punished and that they are not allowed to escape international justice.
