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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 Women's Spirit (Ruach Nashit) – Financial Independence for Women Survivors of Violence, 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.

[23 May 2022]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only. The views expressed in the present document do not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations or its officials.



Women's Spirit, an Israeli non-profit organization, works to recognize Economic Abuse- transparent violence, and destructive phenomenon

Women's Spirit, Special Advisor to the United Nations by the Economic and Social Council since 2019, focuses on rewriting the story of women survivors of abuse. Founded in 2007, we are an innovative Israeli non-profit that works to promote the Economic Independence of women survivors of abuse in Israel, and strives for social justice and gender equality. Women's Spirit is the only organization that operates a unique model, which provides women survivors of abuse with long-term, personally tailored solutions, to help them break the cycle of abuse and rebuild their lives by improving their occupational & financial status. Our target population comes from all economic, social, and racial backgrounds and includes every sector of Israeli society. Our programs are based on the notion that financial independence is an inseparable part of a woman's well-being; a woman cannot protect herself and regain control of her life if she is not financially independent.

Women's Spirit facilitates on three levels: Individual – we provide our women participants with tools, training, and knowledge to find employment and become financially independent. Societal – recruiting and training professional volunteers and businesses that provide support and guidance with training, networking, and job placement. Political – Women's Spirit has taken its work with individuals and spearheaded legislation on behalf of survivors of abuse. We work to change fundamental Israeli policies and laws that undermine, destabilize, and weaken all women but especially women survivors of abuse. Women's Spirit acknowledges that abuse against women and girls is a social epidemic; it is not the story of a single woman or a girl, but rather a rampant problem we have to face and resolve as a society. Much of our work is done through collaborations with partners with other organizations in Israel and abroad, government, private and philanthropic sectors.

The COVID-19 pandemic has emphasized the importance of partnerships. Dealing with the continued crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, Women's Spirit has experienced an almost 40% increase in referrals, compared to the year before the pandemic. The pandemic has affected many aspects of our work, including the increase in domestic violence in the country, and the fact that many women became unemployed and financially insecure. Hence, during the pandemic, we formed even more partnerships, which enabled us to reach significant achievements during a very challenging period for women. On the individual level, our response to the crisis was to shift our work to virtual and provide online training and computers to our women participants in need. We frequently contacted all the participants to see how they are doing and what they need, we set up a very intensive network of almost daily contact. We know that for many we are their only anchor in the storm, and we continue to offer our closest support, even from a physical distance. The personal relationship with the participants has even intensified. More than ever before, we work with the participants to help them exercise their rights in these challenging times while providing ongoing personal support, even providing food vouchers that usually we do not provide.

On the societal level, we manage to expand the circles of awareness of Economic Abuse, by providing hundreds of lectures and workshops in 2021 to over 6,000 people. These workshops presented knowledge about the identification and prevention of Economic Abuse.

On the political level, Women's Spirit has worked closely with decision-makers in the government and the parliament. Observing the urgent needs of women during the pandemic, we demanded that needs would be addressed. For example, with partner organizations we argued, that specific obstacles faced by women who own businesses, with young children at home, must be removed.

Furthermore, we presented to the government, with partner organizations, the issue of child support payments. Many of the women that Women's Spirit assist are single mothers whose former partners do not pay child support, and they depend on funds from the Israeli National Social Insurance. According to law, it is impossible to receive both child support funds and unemployment payments. During the pandemic, in which many women were fired, we argued that this law must be changed, as at that time of crisis, more than ever, single mothers who have been fired needed both payments. Our efforts, within the Coalition for Child

Support Payments, were successful and the National Social Insurance has changed its policy. Until the end of 2022, these women will be entitled to both funds. We will continue the struggle to make this legislation permanent.

Our lesson from the pandemic is that inter-sectoral partnerships are the way to overcome major crises. Without working with partners that represent a diversity of outlooks, we would not have been able to assist women survivors of abuse and promote gender equality.

To foster the implementation of law and policy, we advocate in the Knesset for women's equal rights, and women's representation in decision making and we also join appeals in court acting as "Amicus Curiae". In a recent appeal, with other partners, we joined as amicus curia in an important appeal as experts on economic violence and succeeded in changing the ruling. This precedential decision held that survivors of violence can receive single parent benefits (in this case, a study grant), regardless of when they stayed at a women's shelter. Following the decision, the National Insurance Institute changed the procedure in respect of the entitlement to a study grant. In the appeal filed by a single mother with 4 children and a survivor of violence, the National Labor Court held that the plaintiff is entitled to a study grant for her children, even before her divorce is final, and regardless of the time, she spent in a women's shelter. Women's Spirit presented the court with the reality of the life of women survivors of abuse, the difficulties inherent in fleeing a violent relationship, and the fact that many women are forced to return to their violent partner even after staying in a shelter – at times very often before the final break, mostly due to economic dependency. The Israeli National Labor Court accepted our position and ruled that the period between the date a woman stays in a shelter and the date of the grant application is irrelevant.

One of the many barriers that women survivors of abuse face is debts, made in their name without them knowing. The Bill Against Economic Violence which Women's Spirit played a central role in drafting and promoting, wish to name economic violence and define a way for the victims to claim justice. The bill passed its first reading in 2020 and we keep on advocating for it in the Knesset to move forward for the second and third readings. The message of the Law for the Prevention of Economic Violence is that it no longer pays to be financially violent because whoever creates the debts will also be the one who is responsible for paying them.

Our goal as an organization is to end violence against women and girls. Our ways to accomplish this goal combined our work with women survivors of abuse, to help them achieve financial independence, expand awareness of economic abuse, and to remove barriers from policy and law which prevent women survivors of abuse to rehabilitate and become financially independent.

Our way forward is to keep advocating for women survivors of abuse, keep expanding our workshop and lectures to the public and private sector to raise awareness for economic abuse and assist women from all backgrounds and sectors to achieve financial independence, not only in Israel but worldwide.

Economic and financial abuse is a world phenomenon. With our partners over the world, we wish to see Economic and Financial Abuse recognized, as a relatively new and developing way for abusers to hurt and control, usually combined with other types of violence. We ask for it to be acknowledged also by the United Nations institutions, initiating this Special Rapporteur committee.