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QUESTION OF THE VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE OCCUPIED ARAB
TERRITORIES, INCLUDING PALESTINE

Written statement* submitted by Women's Federation for World Peace International,
a non-governmental organization in general consultative status

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

[7 February 2003]

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

The list of human rights violations related to the Arab-Israeli stalemate is staggering. But the list of corresponding justifications as to why the enemy deserved it runs equally as long. In light of this, it is no wonder that peace is as elusive to this region as it has been, especially when this distorted and shortsighted framework for ethical judgement is accepted and even lauded by leaders, policy makers, educators and parents. Although not unique to the Middle East, the protracted nature of the hostilities there illustrates the consequences of being swept into such a destructive and consuming spiral. Dehumanization of the enemy grants impunity and even glorification to acts of oppression, torture and murder. No parent under any healthy circumstances would ever applaud her or his child's involvement in such heinous criminal behavior. To halt such a cycle that has by this time affected most families in a very personal way is no easy task.

We call for a reformation in the area of good governance. We ask for leaders who seek to solve their constituents' problems by addressing their root causes and who labor to create policies that heal and transform all forms of social ills. Any leader who is able to recreate his vision for achievable peace in the minds and hearts of the population with the same fervor as the insecurity and confusion that hold it now, will remain a lasting legacy.

It is a fact that there are many local initiatives in the region, especially among women NGO's who are attempting to break down these walls of ignorance that lead to intolerance and hatred through mutual dialogue, reconciliation and common projects across barriers of ethnicity, religion, and culture- successfully. Recent governmental efforts to recognize civil societies spontaneous initiatives toward peace are a step in the right direction and the inclusion of these local women's voices at any peace negotiations might just be the link to their successful implementation and sustainability

When the Women's Federation for World Peace held its Sixth Women's Conference for Peace in the Middle East last year on the issue of Women's Role in Building Peace through Non-violence, it noted that the very diverse cross section of participants representing 14 countries of the region held many of the same core values and concerns irregardless of their ethnic, religious and cultural differences. And it was found, as difficult as it sometimes was, that when one dared to really listen to and empathize with the enemy, one could hear the same pain in their voices as that from their own daughters, sisters and mothers. And there appears the crack in the mindset that justifies intolerance, oppression and much worse.

This following is a part of the outcome document of that conference which was intended for the governments of the region and the institutions that bind them- such as the United Nations.

The Crete Declaration

We, the undersigned, the Women's Coalition for Peace in the Middle East (WCPM) - an initiative of the Women's Federation for World Peace International (WFWP, UN NGO of ECOSOC Category I), express our deep sorrow and anger at the continuing cycles of violence in the Middle East.

In the spirit of establishing security and peace in the Middle East, we call for the cessation of the Israeli-Palestinian violence and of the restoration of international legitimacy in all areas where conflicts exist. We call upon the International Community to recognise and support the efforts of civil society in promoting peace in the Middle East.

In accordance with UN resolution 1325, which reaffirmed “the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peacebuilding, and (stressed) the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance of peace and security”, we recognise our active role especially in the areas of peacebuilding, civil reconstruction and development. We will foster compassion and reconciliation in our society. We will co-operate as women and mothers to bring peace to the Middle East region and help bring an end to a century old conflict, working together in equal participation and mutual respect.

The conference concluded by proposing a series of initiatives, such as but not limited to:

- Collaborating in research projects on women’s conditions and experiences in the region as a basis for policy recommendations.
- Encouraging educational institutions to adopt education for peace materials into their curriculum.
- Providing training for women – empowerment, gender awareness, legal literacy and conflict resolution.
- Influencing media to project a balanced and positive image of the cultural and religious diversity of the region.

In light of the above, we welcome co-operation with and support from the appropriate governmental and United Nations agencies and other relevant bodies”
