



## Economic and Social Council

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### Commission on the Status of Women

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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”: implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives**

### **Statement submitted by Human Rights League of the Horn of Africa, 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.



## **Statement**

### **Elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls in the Horn of Africa (Ethiopia)**

#### **Profile**

Human Rights League of the Horn of Africa was originally founded in Ethiopia in 1996 under the name “Human Rights League”, but was silenced from the outset by the country’s authoritarian regime. It was relaunched from the diaspora in 2007 by exiled founders and members of Human Rights League. It was then renamed Human Rights League of the Horn of Africa and registered as a non-profit and non-political organization in Ontario, Canada, on 14 June 2007.

Human Rights League of the Horn of Africa aims to defend fundamental human rights, including freedom of thought, expression and assembly or organization. It also aims to raise the awareness of individuals regarding their own basic human rights and that of others. It intends to work on the observance of international and regional treaties, protocols, covenants, instruments and agreements on human rights, as well as due process of related laws. It promotes the growth and development of free and vigorous civil societies.

#### **Introduction**

The second paragraph of the Preamble to the Charter of the United Nations underlined the determination of the peoples of the United Nations to reaffirm fundamental human rights, the dignity and worth of the human person and the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small. Moreover, the Charter, in its Article 1 (3), proclaims that one of the purposes of the United Nations is to achieve international cooperation in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to, inter alia, sex.

A comprehensive set of rights to which all persons, including women, are entitled, the International Bill of Human Rights (the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights), along with related human rights treaties, was adopted and came into force. However, all these did not guarantee women the enjoyment of their internationally agreed rights. To end this inhuman and gender-based discriminatory human rights violation, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women was adopted in 1979 by the General Assembly and came into force on 3 September 1981.

Despite the drafting of the Convention to tackle human rights violations against women, all forms of violence against women and girls remain rampant in many countries of the world, including in the Horn of Africa.

Today, women are the most neglected and vulnerable part of society in Ethiopia. They are considered second-class citizens, while the responsibilities that they carry are double that of men. Women and girls in Ethiopia are dying by the hundreds every day, partly because their second-class status makes them vulnerable to violence and unsafe sexual intercourse, which exposes them to venereal diseases, including HIV/AIDS.

More than 4 million people are still in urgent need of assistance in Ethiopia after the worst drought that the region has seen in 60 years. The most victimized members of the society are women and children because women have less income than men and are the ones looking after the needs of their children. This paper will try to give a general overview of the current human rights situation of women in Ethiopia and some recommendations.

### **Situation in Ethiopia with regard to women's rights protection under international and regional documents**

Even though Ethiopia became one of the foremost countries in the world to sign and ratify the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 1981, the Government of Ethiopia has not complied with the terms of the Convention. In addition, it is reluctant to sign or ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention. The Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, which was adopted by the African Union in July 2003 at its second summit in Maputo, Mozambique, is also not yet ratified by the Government.

The 1995 Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, in article 35, abolished the historical legacy of inequality and discrimination suffered by women and guarantees the equal rights of women with men. Today, however, women in most parts of Ethiopia do not share equal rights with men and are considered as property. In most rural parts of the country, women are not allowed to own land and depend on their husbands' share to survive. Article 34 (2) of the Constitution, under marital and family rights, states that marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouse. However, the reality on the ground shows that in the rural part of the country, marriage is entered into through the agreement of both families and without the knowledge of the intended spouse. Forced marriage or abduction of girls while they are away from their villages to collect firewood or fetch water from the river is very common.

Today, there are hundreds of women prisoners of conscience languishing in Ethiopian jails. Of the thousands of street children in the city, more than half are girls. These girls and women receive no protection from the Government and continue to be the victims of rape and HIV/AIDS.

The high unemployment rate and the economic crisis in Ethiopia have exposed women and girls to high levels of human trafficking, particularly those in the urban areas. These trafficked women and girls most typically end up serving as domestic labourers in Arab Gulf countries and Lebanon, without any measure of protection or responsibility from the State because the Government of Ethiopia does not comply with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking. This results in thousands of Ethiopian women and underage girls being subjected to ill treatment and rights violations. A good example is the Ethiopian domestic worker in Lebanon, Alem Dachassa, who was physically abused in public and committed suicide (reported by local media in Lebanon and Al-Jazeera on 14 March 2012).

Advocacy and awareness work on human rights, including women's rights, in Ethiopia are in jeopardy owing to the civil society law of 2009, which cripples human rights work in the country.

The law prevents the involvement of organizations that receive more than 10 per cent of their funding from abroad in human rights, gender equality and conflict resolution.

**Recommendations**

- The Government of Ethiopia should sign and ratify all international and regional women's rights protection instruments, and the United Nations and African Union have the responsibility to hold the Government accountable for their implementation.
  - The Government of Ethiopia should monitor and evaluate the availability of a solid policy framework and legal mechanisms to halt traffickers of women and girls.
  - The Government of Ethiopia should comply with international human rights standards to make sure that women's human rights are respected and that women achieve equal treatment with men.
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