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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 International Rescue Committee, 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

Women's Refugee Commission

The Women's Refugee Commission, which is legally part of the International Rescue Committee, welcomes the theme of the fifty-eighth session of the Commission on the Status of Women on "Challenges and achievements in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls". This thematic focus provides the international community with a significant opportunity to address the gaps in the ability of the Goals to engender development for the most marginalized women and girls, including those who are refugees or internally displaced, and create a transformative new development framework.

Member States already have a strong basis on which to introduce a bold agenda and reverse the current global trend towards inequality. "Leaving no one behind" was the overriding theme of the 2013 global consultations on the post-2015 development agenda. The consultations emphasized the specific needs of women, children and youth and called attention to particularly vulnerable groups, such as those with disabilities and those who are forcibly displaced. The consultations also highlighted the near complete lack of progress made towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals in emergency settings. The Women's Refugee Commission, from its 25 years of work with women, children and youth, knows that emergencies are the very situations that often make it impossible for displaced and refugee women and girls to claim their rights.

Women's Refugee Commission also knows from its work that forced displacement exacerbates inequalities. Displaced women and girls are more vulnerable to all forms of gender-based violence. Many do not possess safe and equal access to available humanitarian aid, and most are unable to participate meaningfully in decision-making processes. Refugees are often denied their right to work legally, which leaves refugee women and girls at even higher risk of sexual exploitation, forced to trade sex for food and other basic necessities. Quality reproductive health care remains out of reach for many. Access to education and vocational training for refugee women and girls is also a serious concern.

Recommendations

The Women's Refugee Commission calls upon Member States to create a new set of goals that are rights-based and designed to deliver for all women and girls, especially the most vulnerable, such as the forcibly displaced and those with disabilities. We therefore ask Member States, particularly those members of the Commission on the Status of Women, to:

(a) Build on what has worked. In his report on a life of dignity for all ([A/68/202](#)), the Secretary-General notes that those Millennium Development Goals that emphasized inclusion; safe, decent and sustainable livelihoods; increasing resources for essential services; and facilitating greater access to services and partnerships across sectors are the ones that delivered the greatest development gains;

(b) Create goals that are rights-based and prioritize women, young people and marginalized groups, including refugees and displaced persons and those with disabilities. The specific needs of children and young people, which are distinct

from those of adults, must be addressed. All goals also must be disability-inclusive and, furthermore, recognize that persons with disabilities are not a homogenous group. This requires each goal to have indicators that require disability-inclusive approaches in displacement and emergency settings and that are gender sensitive. Development goals and indicators must be in line with the principles of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities thus ensuring the new framework emphasizes the dignity and autonomy of individual persons with disabilities;

(c) Take conflict, crisis and disaster settings into account and design goals and indicators that can speed early recovery and development work in these contexts. This approach will protect human rights, promote peacebuilding and sustainable development and make good economic sense;

(d) Design indicators for all goals that require the tracking of data disaggregated by sex, age and disability. In addition, data collection undertaken to track indicators should be participatory and involve affected populations;

(e) Create a truly transformative, stand-alone goal to achieve gender equality, women's rights and women's empowerment. The global, systemic nature of gender inequality requires a stand-alone goal with robust indicators applicable to a variety of contexts in order to achieve substantial progress in eradicating discrimination against women and girls. It will also drive development for everyone;

(f) Employ the new framework to end violence against women and girls. This may be achieved most effectively through a stand-alone goal, which would reflect the status of violence against women and girls as perhaps the most serious and pervasive human rights violation, the cause of considerable, harmful physical and mental health conditions and a key barrier to women's participation in education, livelihoods and public life. To make this approach comprehensive, construct indicators across numerous goals and take into account groups, such as displaced women and girls and those with disabilities, who are at heightened risk of violence against women and girls;

(g) Ensure that women, especially the most marginalized, such as displaced women, can meaningfully participate in all formal decision-making processes that affect their lives. Marginalization in community decision-making and leadership roles was an area of concern that displaced women themselves highlighted during a series of regional dialogues with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in 2010 and 2011. Women's voices must be central to processes that affect their lives;

(h) Create a goal on reproductive health care for women and girls that measures access and quality to comprehensive services, including voluntary contraception and maternal health care. Such a goal must be measured not just at the country level, but should ensure access and quality is equitable and available to conflict- and disaster-affected populations. Only by taking a comprehensive approach to women and girls' reproductive health will women and girls gain control over their bodies and their lives;

(i) Place a special focus within a sustainable livelihoods goal on income generation opportunities for women and youth. In emergency and displacement settings, women and young women are often provided ineffective or unsafe opportunities to earn an income, if they are provided opportunities at all. This

imbalance, with due attention to ensuring livelihoods are safe, decent, and sustainable, must be rectified;

(j) Address the specific needs and rights of girls, especially those in humanitarian settings, during childhood and adolescence, in indicators across numerous goals. Such an approach will help girls to better protect themselves, stay healthy, gain an education and contribute to the prosperity of their families and communities. Girls will benefit most when their potential to be active, valuable members of their families and community is embraced;

(k) Embed cross-cutting issues, such as urbanization, in indicators to ensure that goals deliver development for everyone. Address the specific needs and opportunities presented by growing urbanization and poverty in urban areas. More refugees now live in urban areas than in camp settings. Meeting the needs of displaced women and girls in cities requires solutions rooted in a development approach that promotes self-reliance and engages existing structures rather than creating parallel systems.

The specific needs of displaced women and girls must be addressed in the post-2015 development framework if we are to finally achieve our global poverty reduction goals and achieve true, sustainable rights-based development. If their needs are effectively addressed, displaced women and girls can drive development, build peaceful communities and break the inter-generational cycle of poverty.

The year 2015 is set to be momentous, not only because it will usher in a new set of development goals. In 2015, the humanitarian community will be in the final stages of preparing for the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit. And the women's movement will mark 15 years since the establishment of the Women, Peace and Security agenda and 20 years since the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. The Women's Refugee Commission therefore encourages all members of the international community to view these United Nations processes as a whole by which to comprehensively address crucial issues for women and girls. It particularly urges the international community to reflect on the needs and rights of forcibly displaced women and girls, along with other marginalized groups of women. All international actors must consider not just how to improve protection for vulnerable groups, but also how to better empower them and help displaced, refugee and all women and girls become agents of development and change for themselves, their families and their communities.