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Statement submitted by Salvation Army, 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 Salvation Army is an international movement and an evangelical branch of the universal Christian Church. Its message is based on the Bible. Its ministry is motivated by the love of God. Its mission is to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ and to meet human needs in his name without discrimination.

We the Salvation Army operate in 126 countries. We have over 150 years of experience working with women and girls from around the world.

We applaud the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in all aspects and welcome the review of the Beijing Platform for Action at the 59th session of the Commission on the Status of Women. We agree that after nearly 20 years the established task continues to require urgent action in a spirit of determination, hope, cooperation and solidarity.

Faith-based organizations have a significant role to play in the discussion of Beijing Platform for Action. The role of a faith-based organization is living out faith through actions by caring for women, children the oppressed, the hungry and those in need.

Faith-based organizations often fill the gap where governments and secular Non-Government Organization fail or are not present. Faith-based organizations have consistently highlighted women's issues and have become the voice of women who don't normally or traditionally have a voice within their society.

Despite the twenty years of national and international agreements to advance women's rights, many of the goals of the Beijing Platform for Action remain unfulfilled.

In this year of assessment and review of the Beijing Platform for Action, the Salvation Army would like to highlight three themes specifically that still require action by all states to advance women's human rights: Women and Poverty, the Girl Child and Women in Positions of Leadership and Power.

The information that we will be sharing comes from the voices of engaged, Salvation Army women who are working with women and girls at the service provision level. This is their input into this statement.

Women and Poverty

We would like to recognize some of the factors that women in poverty face. In one country that we operate approximately 54% of the population lives below the poverty line, and women make up a significantly greater proportion of that group than men, particularly in the rural area. This is due to educational obstacles and domestic labor stereotypes faced by women and girls.

Lack of education and illiteracy prevent women from accessing potential opportunities to move out of poverty. Without education and literacy they are unable to continue to higher education and are not employable for higher paying jobs.

In one country impoverished women are at a particular disadvantage because of legal obstacles that prevent them from being able to access poverty-aiding governmental support services. In order to obtain governmental support services

such as rice subsidies, health insurance, and cash transfer payments, female heads of household are required to prove that they are indeed the head of the household through providing documentation of marriage and divorce or death of spouse.

However, more than 50% of marriages and 86% of divorces are not legally registered, thus preventing female heads of household (who make up 14% of all heads of household) from recognition and therefore access to obtaining government assistance. No such requirement is imposed on male heads of household.

In some countries there are nearly twice as many women living in poverty as men, and approximately 1/3 of all elderly women live in poverty. Several factors contribute to this gender disparity, including the fact that far more women are employed in temporary jobs and that even when women can obtain the same jobs as men; they are paid less for the same work. The elderly female population is particularly subject to poverty because many of them have never worked outside the home, and therefore the pensions upon which they attempt to subsist are very small.

The Girl Child

We recognize that there has been progress in the rights of the girl child over the past 20 years but we believe that more can be done to ensure that girls are given the chance to have the same opportunities as their male counterparts.

In some of the countries where we operate, we have found that the girl child still faces greater challenges. The situation for the girl child is dichotomous. While the percentage of girls who complete a high school education in the major cities is actually higher than that of boys, education for girls is scarce to find. This makes young girls easy targets of exploitation for men who attempt to lure them away from their families with the promise of a better life. An illustration of this is particularly true in the mining areas of one country where we work where women have been lured away and then kidnapped, forced into servitude for the men working the mines.

In rural areas, education for girls is regarded as having very little value. The majority of female children will not finish high school, and even in instances where a girl's intelligence and motivation for school is greater than her male counterparts' she will not be given access to higher education.

Women in positions of leadership and power and decision-making

When it comes to women in leadership and power it can be noted that over the past 20 years women have made some advancement in leadership and power. Even though women may sit in positions of power they are not necessarily sitting in the decision-making positions. Men still have more access to power and participation in decision-making. Many women feel that discrimination, inequality, injustice, and prejudices are still the barriers that stop them from being included in decision-making.

Women can be placed in positions of leadership at times to meet a quota or a goal, but often with a lack of training, experience and competency. It is still the case that governments and civil society show preference to men in decision-making

positions and that parenthood can interrupt the movements of women into positions of authority in a way not experienced by men.

It needs to be noted that in almost every country of the world women are still not achieving their full capacity and are under-utilized in decision-making leadership positions. There is still a subtle prejudice against women; that is women have to prove themselves to a greater extent than men for the same roles or expression of power and authority.

We urge governments in the Post 2015 efforts to intensify strategic responses to women and girls issues especially the poor and the vulnerable. Although efforts have been made to combat poverty after the formation of the Millennium Development Goals the gap between the wealthiest and the poorest is increasing.

Poverty is persistent and a burden on women and girls. We urge governments to intentionally include faith-based organizations in their planning processes and their national development of plans for the Post 2015 development agenda.

We urge governments to promote educational models to equip women and girls for positions of leadership and decision-making.

We urge governments to work with faith-based organizations that have been working with grass roots women for over 150 years and have been successful!
