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Statement submitted by World Lebanese Cultural Union, 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

On behalf of the World Lebanese Cultural Union I am asking for your support in attaining women's rights in Lebanon the Middle East as adopted by the Beijing Platform. We are requesting help and support in the following:

- Abolishing domestic abuse by enforcing deterring laws
- Monetary support in order to help educate and train our women for the challenges of the 21st century
- Support our women to have equal civil rights in front of the law
- Protect children rights and eliminate child marriages
- Adopt civil marriage and support separation of church and state

We appreciate your mission, your time and effort and we look very much forward to your acceptance of our document as official documents at the United Nations. Below, please find a detailed description of the above urgent requests.

ABOLISHING DOMESTIC ABUSE BY ENFORCING DETERRING LAWS

Most of the problems with domestic violence in Lebanon are stemming from the fact that the country has been residing under a debilitating war that took a huge toll on the economic situation. Poverty and lack of opportunities for work is making it extremely difficult for families to sustain a descent humane standard of living. Men have been predominantly the main source providing for their families. The lack of opportunity has made it nearly impossible to provide. This problem generated a new phenomenon whereby the husband, the father or the brother resorts to extreme domestic violence against women and children in order to release their frustration. Women and children have become the victims that pay the highest price, their lives.

This problem is exacerbated by the fact that the Lebanese government does not provide any protection by law to a battered woman. They treat this issue as a private and a personal affair between the male and his significant other. This situation is leading to an alarming number of women being killed by their husband in the recent past. Men that end up killing their wives spend few months in jail at best and they get released. Men get released by merely accusing their wives of adultery. The lack of serious punishment is encouraging other men to commit equally heinous crimes.

For the above reasons, we are requesting abolishing domestic violence in all its forms, including but not limited to spousal killing, assault and battery, verbal abuse, psychological abuse, rape, marital rape, and child abandonment or endangerment. We believe punishing spousal killing by enforcing capital punishment will deter other men from committing similar crimes.

Punishing rape, marital rape, or child rape with incarceration without parole for a very long time will save the soul of these victims and diminish the recurrence of such crimes in the future.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING OF WOMEN

Many women in our country tend to endure subhuman treatment by their spouses due to the fact that they are not educated enough to be on their own, or they have no family to go back to. Establishing governmental aid to provide shelters for

battered women and children is a necessity in order to break the cycle of violence and limit the casualties. Furthermore, we need some United Nation assistance in helping the women get educated and improve their earning power. Educating women and empowering them is critical to building healthy families.

Many able women who are unhappily married cannot get a divorce without spousal acceptance making her a lesser person than her man. Even when she gets her divorce she will not be able to take care of her children or see them unless her husband approves it. We request that able women get the priority to care for their children especially if the children are minors. Forcing men to pay alimony and child support based on financial laws related to the man's income.

EQUAL CIVIL RIGHTS IN FRONT OF THE LAW

A Lebanese man can give his wife and his children the Lebanese citizenship automatically. This is true irrespective of how many times a man marries and divorces. On the other hand, the Lebanese woman cannot give her husband or her children the Lebanese citizenship. This is a huge discrimination between men and women's rights in our country.

PROTECTING CHILDREN RIGHTS AND ELIMINATING CHILD MARRIAGES

Many underage girls who get abducted from their homes end up in the abductor's hand. The reason is the abductor can claim her as his wife under marriage even if the girl is still a child. This will deprive her parents from pressing charges against a child rapist. We request abolishing child marriages by considering any marriages for women that are under eighteen illegal and unacceptable under the law.

ADOPTING CIVIL MARRIAGE AND SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE

Most of the problems with marriages in Lebanon stem from the fact that marriage is still done under the religious organization, this leads to complicated laws that are confusing and not conforming. We are requesting that marriage becomes a civil issue and should abide by laws of the State and not religion. Marriage should only be considered legal if it is a civil marriage. The marriage law would be very clear and all couples irrespective of their religious affiliations would abide by the same set of rules.
