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**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and
to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly
entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and
peace for the twenty-first century”**

Statement submitted by Women Organization for Development and Capacity-Building, 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 Women Organization for Development and Capacity-Building continues to participate in the meetings of the Commission on the Status of Women on the occasion of its sixtieth session, which takes up “Women’s empowerment and the link to sustainable development” and “The elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls”. The Women Organization for Development and Capacity Building (Labena) is a voluntary, non-governmental non-profit organization founded in 2004. The Organization works in sustainable development and combating violence against women in regions of conflict and war. It works to protect the dignity and humanity of women, build their capacities and empower them in all areas to increase their participation in decision-making and thereby enable them to play their role as a partner in sustainable development.

The Organization has been active in Sudan and was active in South Sudan for seven years before the separation. The Organization is currently active in the states of Central Darfur, Blue Nile, South Kordofan, Kassala, Qadaria, Red Sea, West Kordofan and Khartoum.

The relation employs 75 persons to implement its projects. In addition, a large number of volunteers are organized into “Labena” groups that are involved in grassroots activities.

The Organization’s educational and training programmes target women and children (especially female adolescents) in the camps, voluntary return areas and host communities as well as community leaders and civil-administration leaders to involve them in efforts to achieve sustainable development and combat violence against women by empowering women.

The Organization faces a number of challenges due to the nature of its work and the areas in which it operates, including the following:

1. Wars and conflicts. Wars and conflict have caused the death of thousands of civilians, most of them women and children, and the displacement of large numbers of people, also largely women and children who live in camps. Wars and conflict have worsened conditions, propagated violence and perpetuated harmful customs. They have resulted in the orphaning and conscripting of children in the subjection of women to violence when they attempt to bring water and gather wood for fuel from distant areas. These conditions pose a major challenge to the empowerment of women and development of their capacities, as priority in the allocation of support and financing must be given to life-saving humanitarian assistance over women’s empowerment and development.

2. Reproductive health has improved and the maternal mortality rate has declined by more than 50 percent thanks to the training and qualification of midwives and the increase in the number of primary health care centres. Nonetheless, greater efforts are still urgently needed. Early marriage is a major challenge and a primary cause of mortality. There is thus an urgent need for civil society organizations to use all educational, treatment and legal means to play an effective role in raising awareness and in monitoring the enforcement of laws prohibiting such practices.

3. Poverty. Third-world countries, particularly rural areas and conflict regions, have high poverty rates against the backdrop of wars and the current

economic and climate conditions. Women are one of the groups most affected by poverty due to the paucity of opportunities for them to partake of investment and financing despite the efforts that have been made to finance small enterprises and poverty-reduction projects. Additional efforts and measures are therefore needed to improve the living situation of women and to empower them socially and economically, especially as they bear the burden of responsibility for their families in times of war and conflict.

4. A number of laws must be amended to harmonize with the provisions on the civil and legal rights of women in national constitutions and agreements in effect. This requires a greater effort on the part of parliamentary organizations and human rights centres.

5. Coercive measures, the economic embargo, and economic boycott measures are the greatest challenges facing the health, economic and social development of women in Sudan. We therefore urge all participants to stand with Sudanese women and children against such measures and to call for the lifting of the sanctions affecting women and children.

Challenges facing organizations active in the protection and empowerment of women:

1. Financing of organizations active in women's affairs, particularly national organizations.

2. Training and qualification of cadres involved in addressing violence against women and the empowerment of women.

3. Conveyance of humanitarian assistance and programmes to protect women from violence in conflict regions.

4. Inclusion of gender issues and protection of women from violence in humanitarian work in Sudan.

5. The lessening of the leadership role of the United Nations Resident/Humanitarian Coordinator in supporting the inclusion of gender and protection of women from violence in humanitarian programmes.

6. Programmatic coordination between organizations working in the field of women's rights with United Nations agencies and international organizations.

There are programmes and mechanisms that help curb violence against women, including: the implementation of policies and strategies that empower women politically and socially; establishment of a centralized unit to combat violence in the Ministry of Justice (the unit works with the Organization in the area of education and legal services); establishment of units and mechanisms in the states (these units and mechanisms have handled many cases of women who have been harmed); formation of a network of organizations active in combating violence against women and girls (the Labena Organization is a member of the network); programmes of organizations active in combating violence against women and girls (these programmes target education and capacity building for community leaders, clerics and grass roots committees); continuation of official and voluntary entities' projects that support the combating of violence against women; and the Organization's entry into technical and in-kind assistance sectors with a view to

combating violence against women (food security, means of subsistence, early recovery and sustainable solutions and water and health).

The Organization has implemented a programme to prevent and combat violence against women in Blue Nile state through educational activities targeting 5000 members of the community, including women and men, male and female teachers, female students, parent councils in the schools, community leaders and housewives. The programme included lectures by judges, attorneys, workers in anti-violence units and the community police. It addressed females who have been harmed and treated their problems, and it raised the awareness of other groups, particularly young girls outside the school system.

Theatrical presentations in the local language and radio programmes were used to raise the awareness of local communities and the targeted groups consistent with the Organization's approach to use means suited to the communities it serves.

In South Kurdufan a project was implemented to combat violence against women. The project targeted 7000 women. It involved grassroots associations brought together members of the community, civic leaders and the police in awareness-raising and guidance programmes. The awareness-raising activities covered rights and laws concerning the combating of violence against women. The project also distributed health supplies to 500 women.

Another project in South Kurdufan targeted a group of 300 women from a number of tribes — including the Nuba, Baggara, Misseriya and Hawazma. Thirty per cent of these women had been harmed by the war or were subjected violence as a result of early, forced marriage traditions. Some of the woman had been harmed by compulsory divorce and abandonment as a result of intertribal conflicts.

In Central Darfur, the Organization implemented a project to protect displaced persons from violence and violation of basic rights. The project targeted 15,000 displaced persons. Networks and grassroots groups were formed and trained to protect women against violence.

In Central Darfur, the Organization has implemented successful sustainable development projects to combat poverty and empower women socially, economically and politically.

In Blue Nile, the Organization has implemented a food security project to train fishermen in current fishing and net maintenance methods. The fishermen were given ownership of fishing boats and nets and women were trained in environment-friendly methods (improved stoves), food processing and manual labour. Vocational training was given to youth in electricity and blacksmithing, and the youth were equipped with tools to practice these vocations.

In Central Darfur, the Organization implemented a project to improve the living situation of displaced persons and provide them with sustainable solutions. The project targeted 300 vulnerable women who had been prisoners of warring tribes. The women, after their voluntary return, worked in groups on collective farms using easy-to-use work implements. Agricultural production inputs and extension services were provided to them. These collective farms are located in Wadi Azoum. The women perform all the agricultural tasks and maintain excellent social relations among themselves. They participate in social and national holidays. The agricultural and harvest seasons are times for celebrations in which they

participate with the local government, which granted the women land under official contracts, and with popular local committees from the villages, private businessmen, and donor organizations under the Organization's supervision. These women have transformed themselves from being victims damaged by war and conflict into a productive group that is at peace with itself.

The Organization has established rural savings and credit funds to economically empower rural women in South Kurdufan.

In its efforts to empower women politically, the Organization participated in all stages of the 2015 elections. It engaged in raising awareness, providing training and monitoring through its offices in the states and in Khartoum, benefiting 50,000 persons.

Regarding peacebuilding, the Organization conducted many tribal reconciliations and sponsored peaceful coexistence committees and programmes to strengthen and propagate a culture of peace and incorporate women in committees, conferences and meetings intended to reconcile between warring tribes.

The Organization has partnerships and coordinates with international and national Organizations, including the UNDP, UNICEF, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, World Health Organization, Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development and Catholic Relief Fund. The Organization also partners with ministries and organizations, including the ministries of health, education, agriculture and social development, the Women's Centre for Peace and Development, the Human Rights Centre and national organizations (Mubadiroon, Sudanese Women General Union, Rafidah Health Organization and the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Commission). The Labena Organization is an effective member in: humanitarian action sectors; the national machinery for combating AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria; the network of organizations working to combat violence against women; and the Civil Society Forum of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development.

Recommendations:

1. Cessation of war and achievement of peace, which are key foundations for the empowerment of women.
2. Donors' provision of the necessary financing and technical support through United Nations agencies to national organizations working in the field of women's rights.
3. Support of national organizations through external partnerships that lead to networking and exchange of expertise.
4. Promotion of the role of the UN Women and linkage of the latter with organizations active in the field of women's rights.
5. Programmatic coordination and exchange of expertise among organizations active in the field of human rights.