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entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and
peace for the twenty-first century”**

Statement submitted by Israel Women’s Network, 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 Israel Women's Network was established in 1984 as an independent, non-partisan Civil Society Organization that works to promote equality for women in Israel through legislation and policy change, legal services, education and research, and changing the public discourse on gender equality. The Israel Women's Network strives to lead social change that will create a more just and equal society in Israel, in which all women regardless of race, religion or ethnicity enjoy equal rights and the status they deserve as human beings.

In the last 30 days, three women were murdered by their partners in Israel. One 29 year-old woman was beaten to death by her boyfriend in broad daylight on the street in South Tel Aviv, a week later a woman was killed by her partner in Bat Yam, and another woman was killed by her husband in their home in Petach Tikvah.

The Israel Women's Network has identified violence against women as the most prominent issue facing women across the globe and women in Israel today. Affecting more than one third of the world's women, intimate partner violence has reached the level of a global pandemic. Despite decades of women's rights advocacy and three waves of feminist movements, almost half of all women killed across the world, are killed by an intimate partner. In Israel, the problem of domestic violence has not improved over time - if anything it may be worsening. In a progressive, pioneering, and influential state at the forefront of innovation, it is deeply disappointing that Israel fails so significantly at defending its women. Despite being a democratic state with advanced equal rights laws and increasing representation of women in parliament, Israel is far behind its peers in promoting and protecting women's rights.

In Israel today, there are 200,000 reported female victims of domestic violence and over 600,000 children reported to have witnessed domestic violence, which together comprise almost 10 per cent of a population of just under 8.5 million. Yet these numbers hardly reflect the true gravity of the phenomenon due to the large numbers of women who do not report abuse. The 2014 "violence index" compiled by the Women's International Zionist Organization revealed that about 65 domestic violence cases are opened in Israel per day.

In the last decade, almost 200 women were murdered by their partners in Israel, while the number of women who survived an attempted murder, and endure continuous physical, sexual, emotional and economic abuse is unknown. Every year thousands of women and children seek refuge in battered women's shelters, of which Israel has only 14. The 14 shelters each have the capacity for about 12 women and their children, who stay in them for an average of 3-6 months.

It is an established fact that in times of escalating conflict, occurrences of domestic violence dramatically increase. During last summer's war, a family violence hotline in Tel Aviv received 60 per cent more calls in the month of July, at the height of the conflict, than it had the previous month. As of this moment, Israel is facing an escalating conflict, and it is imperative that the government prepare to come to the aid of its women.

In close connection, in February of 2015, 7 Israeli police chiefs were released out of service after being accused of sexual harassment. While it was a positive step for these officers to be removed from their posts, it illuminates a much greater

issue — the very people who are supposed to be protecting Israeli women are the ones hurting them. This event is indicative of the institutionalized mistreatment of women in Israel, and of the deep-seated mindset that allows sexual harassment to permeate Israeli society. Former head of the Knesset's Committee on the Status of Women, MK Dr. Aliza Lavie, in 2013 suggested that “the growing violence in Israeli society and the harsh data presented ... indicate that we are on the verge of a social calamity.”

Not everything is stark — Israel has legislated progressive arrangements in both the realms of sexual and domestic violence. Although enforcement is lacking, access to the courts is a protected value in Israel's legal system, which just last year has significantly reduced the fees to be paid to the courts in sexual violence suits. The courts themselves are showing an increase in the severity of punishment and compensation they are willing to award in discrimination and sexual harassment cases.

Yet still, it is unacceptable that any woman be abused and killed by her partner. It is unfathomable that this issue is being disregarded and ignored by the authorities and the public.

The way women are treated in all realms of society — the workplace, the government, the media — both in Israel and across the globe, makes it obvious that women are perceived as less than human; we are devalued, objectified, and dismissed. Unequal representation in the government, the lack of women in executive positions, hyper-sexualization of women in the media, all contribute to the pervading atmosphere of sexism, mistreatment, and violence, and have made progress so interminably slow.

Women's rights advocacy and education efforts need to be both initiated and strengthened by the authorities in Israel. In 2013, a bill was submitted to the Knesset requesting a specialized court for domestic violence in Israel. As of this day, nothing has come of that bill. The Israel Women's Network calls on the United Nations to support such bills, as well as all efforts to combat gender-based violence and to assist and protect survivors of such violence in Israel.

The Israel Women's Network calls on the United Nations to put immediate and ongoing pressure on the Israeli Government to do more to protect the women in Israel. We call on the United Nations to pressure the Israeli government to better enforce its laws, more appropriately train its police force and legal professionals, and offer more support to civil society initiatives addressing the issues of domestic and sexual violence against women. This includes building more shelters and domestic violence prevention centres, retraining civil employees, and increasing women's access to positions of authority in government and corporations. Above all, it includes acknowledging the state of emergency we are in. It is a human right and a women's right to be protected, safe and healthy, and Israel has not recognized how far it is from achieving these goals. We request that the United Nations question Israel's inaction on this matter, and compel the state to recognize it for the national emergency that it is.

The world would without question be a significantly better place if women could lead lives in safety, fulfilment and happiness, protected from gender based violence and abuse, and with a confidence that their governments do everything in their power to protect their fundamental rights and freedom. The Israel Women's Network stresses that it is high time for recognition of this struggle, and much past the time for the violence to end.