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

Statement submitted by Nazra for Feminist Studies, 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

Sustainable Development Goals Cannot Be Realized without the Full Recognition and Participation of Women Human Rights Defenders

Nazra for Feminist Studies would like to seize this opportunity to address the Commission on the Status of Women with the following comments on the agreed conclusions of the 60th Commission on the Status of Women and recommendations for the upcoming 61st Commission on the Status of Women's Annual Session regarding two themes; sexual violence against women and women human rights defenders in relation to the 2030 agenda.

Despite the crucial role women human rights defenders play to achieve gender equality, combat violence against women and girls, and fight for the realization of women human rights around the world, they were mentioned only once in the entire document of the Commission on the Status of Women 60th Agreed Conclusions (para. 21) in the context of welcoming their contribution on placing the interests of women and girls in local, regional, and international agendas which indicate disregard for women human rights defenders in the agreed conclusions, in addition to not prioritizing the pivotal role they conduct as agents of change, the violations they encounter, and the need for protection mechanisms to be enacted for them.

Discrimination and violence against women and girls are mentioned (para. 15) as impediments to the full achievement of gender equality and the realization of all human rights. However, sexual violence needs to be highlighted as the most common form of violence against women and girls especially in conflict and post conflicts situations and the fact that women human rights defenders are more exposed to human rights violations due to their activism. Tactics to punish women human rights defenders by authorities in the Middle East and North African region include incidences of detention, kidnapping, assassination, issuance of travel bans, and asset freezing cases. For instance, the issuance of travel bans against dozens of women human rights defenders such as that issued against prominent women human rights defender Mozn Hasan from Egypt in June 2016. Another example is the detention and interrogation of other activists such as Samar Badawi from Saudi Arabia in 2015. Also, the abduction of women human rights defender Razan Zaitouneh and her colleagues from Syria in December 2014 by armed groups. In addition to the smear campaigns against women human rights defenders in Yemen such as Amal Al Basha and Radhiah Al Mutawakel according to the latest report by the Gulf Center for Human Rights, 2016.

Moreover, it is important to note that with specific regard to collaboration with relevant stakeholders to achieve 2030 agenda (para. 25), it is very important to specify women human rights defenders as agents of change in relation to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. Particularly their role in ensuring gender equality according to Sustainable Development Goal 5 and promoting the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensuring equal access to justice for all to build effective accountability at all levels according to Sustainable Development Goal 16.

The promotion of a safe and enabling environment for all civil society actors to participate in the implementation of the 2030 agenda is mentioned (para. jj). However, the need for protection mechanisms for women human rights defenders from both state and non-state actors are missing in the entire document. Given the fact that human rights violations against two prominent women human rights defenders from the region, the imprisonment of Zainab Al Khawaja from Bahrain and her baby son and the investigation with 3 members from Nazra for Feminist Studies in Egypt, followed by the summoning of Feminist and women human rights defender Mozn Hasan, Nazra's Founder and Executive Director, occurred during the Commission on the Status of Women 60th session. The commission should be aware of such human rights violations committed by states that participate in such "convenings" and fora, claiming to prioritize women's issues, while they conduct these violations. This is important, bearing in mind that the United Nations recognizes the important role of human rights defenders and women human rights defenders. In both the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders (53/144) and the Resolution on Protecting Women Human Rights Defenders (68/181) there are provisions for specific protection for human rights defenders (articles 1, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13) including the right to seek the protection and realization of human rights at the national and international levels and indicate the duties of the states (articles 2, 9, 12, 14, 15) to protect, promote and implement all human rights and to take all necessary measures to ensure the protection of everyone against any violence, threats, retaliation, adverse discrimination, pressure or any other arbitrary action as a consequence of his or her legitimate exercise of the rights referred to in the Declaration. While the Resolution on Protecting Women Human Rights Defenders urges States to put in place gender-specific laws and policies for the protection of women human rights defenders and to ensure that defenders themselves are involved in the design and implementation of these measures and calls on States to protect women human rights defenders from reprisals for cooperating with the United Nations and to ensure their unhindered access to and communication with international human rights bodies and mechanisms.

Subsequently, it is very important to regard women human rights defenders in relation to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and we highly stress the importance of taking the above comments into consideration during the upcoming Commission on the Status of Women 61st session.