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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 and Modern World” Social Charitable Centre, 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

“Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls”.

After the second independence, Azerbaijan has endeavored to create a socio-economic environment in which its population, including its women, can develop. The country progressed in universal primary education and life expectancy; eliminated extreme poverty, declined the percentage of absolute poverty, and moved up from the medium human development group to the high human development group. High literacy rates for both men and women paved the way to work toward eliminating gender segregation in the institutions of higher education and across different employment sectors. However, this economic growth derives benefits on a different scale according to gender. Azerbaijani society should persist in its efforts to continue empowering its women.

Azerbaijan is leaving no stone unturned to promote and ensure women’s rights. Women are playing a sustainable role in the nation-building and economic growth of the country.

Azerbaijan is proud to provide an empowering environment for women in the Islamic world. Achieving gender equality is one of Azerbaijan’s highest priorities and is considered a necessary precondition for fully achieving human development. Unfortunately, all women and girls also rural women in Azerbaijan face different forms of gender-based violence, where many cases continue to go unreported due to the social stigma and the practice of attributing fault to women survivors of violence. So, it can be easy to forget that in rural areas of the country, many women are still deprived of basic opportunities.

Azerbaijan has a history of taking steps to empower women. It was the first Islamic country to grant women political rights equal to men and issued a series of progressive laws on domestic violence, gender equality, anti-trafficking, and the minimum age of marriage. Despite other significant milestones, progress toward gender equality in Azerbaijan is worth praising. Azerbaijan scores were high in reducing the gender gap in educational attainment and health.

Closing gender gaps in access to technology has become a priority for women in Azerbaijan. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the process of digital transformation and has affected everyday life. Gender equality in digitalization and more affordable internet access can also increase the number of women taking advantage of teleworking opportunities, provided there are sound social policies and care infrastructure investments.

In Azerbaijan, especially in the regions, there are still problems with improving the well-being of women and girls from vulnerable groups, the population as a whole, and reducing unemployment. One of the mechanisms for solving this problem is the creation of jobs and the implementation of a long-term program for the development of small and medium-sized businesses. It is necessary to increase the knowledge of women in the field of medium and small business in the region, and the role of women in the lab or market. An assessment of the needs and interests of women and girls from vulnerable groups regarding their participation in economic life showed that the gender barriers that women in the regions face in their participation in economic and public life arise from a number of factors: At the same time, knowledge and the skills of regional women to provide business development services, underdeveloped business credit system, and not enough for business organization and management, it can be said that there is a need to improve skills. Unfortunately, all women and girls also rural women in Azerbaijan face different forms of gender-based violence, where

many cases continue to go unreported due to the social stigma and the practice of attributing fault to women survivors of violence. Many rural women have no chance of supporting their families, as they usually don't get to complete their education and are economically disenfranchised. To those who can't support their children, the early marriage of a child means one less mouth to feed. To break the cycle, a sustainable solution is needed.

Sadly, these important advances were held back by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to the closing of many roads, many women-led companies no longer had access to their traditional markets, and some of the groups, especially the vegetable growers, suffered huge losses. According to the Chairwoman, the pandemic also impacted the Azerbaijan Rural Women's Association (ARWA)'s structure, forcing all operations online. Nevertheless, they took the opportunity to learn in a short period of time how to use Digital tools; with an unexpected bonus that the Association and the members within the groups communicate more than ever before.

Evidently, Azerbaijan has steadily advanced in gender equality as it pursues its aim to become a highly developed country. According to numerous accounts, women's decisions concerning employment are strongly influenced by cultural norms regarding the types of labor and places of work suitable and appropriate for men and women. Overcoming gender-based occupational stereotyping will require expanding women's perceptions of the range of occupational choices available to them. It will also require changing societal attitudes of the roles of women and men so that women are able to have broader community and familial support as they take on the demands of entering non-traditional education and career paths.

Reduced time poverty of women. Gender norms have been evolving for the past years as more women work outside the home, although Azerbaijanis continue to attribute primary responsibility for domestic matters to women. According to our nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), women spend a large share of their time and energy on household responsibilities and this is not altered if a woman engages in income-generating activities. This difference in time allocation for paid work is economically disadvantageous for women.

The Republic of Azerbaijan is one of the countries with a transitional economy. "Although Azerbaijani women have expanded their educational opportunities, they remain an underprivileged group. It is well known that women face more discrimination than men in their working life. The assessment showed that gender inequality in economic activity and participation in public life leads to missed opportunities for economic growth and community development. In Azerbaijan, especially in the regions, there are still problems in improving the well-being of women and girls from vulnerable groups, the population as a whole, and reducing unemployment. One of the mechanisms for solving this problem is the creation of jobs and the implementation of a long-term program for the development of small and medium-sized businesses. It is necessary to increase the knowledge of women in the field of medium and small business in the region, and the role of women in the labour market. An assessment of the needs and interests of women and girls from vulnerable groups regarding their participation in economic life showed that the gender barriers that women in the regions face in their participation in economic and public life arise from a number of factors: At the same time, knowledge and the skills of regional women to provide business development services, underdeveloped business credit system, and not enough for business organization and management, it can be said that there is a need to improve skillset in the regions.

Our non-governmental organizations would never let rural children become victims of early marriages and we will raise them as active citizens so that they learn to stand firm on their own two feet.

Non-governmental organizations of Azerbaijan frequently conducts women's awareness event. The core aim is to promote awareness among women and girls. The special project on strengthening civil society's role in the promotion of gender equality and women's rights is being elaborated to increase the role of non-governmental organizations.

Non-governmental organizations of Azerbaijan have fostered active engagement and cooperation with the United Nations and its specialized agencies. Azerbaijan's Government has also been facilitating nongovernmental organizations as they are the fundamental pillar in empowering women and creating awareness.

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