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

Statement submitted by Passionists International, 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

In the midst of both recent and long-standing armed conflicts and armed gang violence raging throughout the world, Passionists International pleas for peace, and voices its urgent concern for the plight of women and girls suffering abhorrent and multiple violations of their human rights in places of conflict. According UN Women's Gender Snapshot 2024, 612 million women and girls live within 50km of one of 170 armed conflicts, an increase of 41 per cent since 2015. The United Nations has also confirmed a 50 per cent increase in cases of conflict-related sexual violence since 2022, with women and girls suffering 95 per cent of these crimes. And we know that a vast number of cases go unreported due to the trauma, shame, stigma, fear of retaliation, lack of security response, lack of health resources, inadequate legal protections, impunity of perpetrators, and the very heightened urgency of survival.

Vulnerability to sexual violence in conflict areas only increases as women and girls are forcibly displaced, become homeless, reside in insecure camps for internally displaced persons and/or are forced to migrate for safety. In their migration journeys they continue to be at high risk for sexual and other forms of violence along the way, including trafficking. Wherever conflict rages, rape and other forms of sexual violence are used as brutal weapons of war, inflicting total violation of the humanity and dignity of women and girls the world over. And many will suffer the consequences for years to come, especially where treatment and support are not available.

In Haiti, where armed gangs have taken over much of the country and are the perpetrators of such crimes, the use of sexual violence against women and girls is a deliberate and central tactic for seizing and controlling power and extorting money, according to a recent letter to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (Feb.26, 2024) RE: Update on Widespread Sexual Violence against Women and Girls in Haiti from Bureau des Avocats Internationaux (BAI), National Human Rights Defense Network (RNDDH), Institute for Justice & Democracy in Haiti (IJDH) and other Haiti-based and solidarity civil society organizations with long-standing engagement on the issue of women's rights and gender-based violence (GBV) in Haiti. They note that:

The underlying harms include rape, frequently by multiple assailants; sexual slavery; torture; physical and psychological violence; public degradation; forced recruitment; and coerced and exploitative sexual relationships. Attacks by members of armed groups are deliberately gruesome – women, both old and very young, are being raped by multiple men in front of their families and sometimes killed or forced to watch their loved ones executed alongside the sexual assault. With some regularity the perpetrators film the assaults and even circulate those videos on social media. The goal is to terrorize women, girls, and their communities, and to restrict their ability to live fully embodied lives.

In Gaza, the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Sexual Violence in Conflict reports grave concerns re: allegations of sexual violence perpetrated against hostages and mounting reports of alleged sexualized torture of detainees. Oxfam and its partners report additional aspects of the war's devastating impact on women who are bearing a double burden of suddenly becoming heads of households, and navigating survival and care in the midst of destruction and homelessness. Pregnant and breastfeeding mothers have faced the collapse in healthcare and maternity services. And much of the country is now at risk of starvation as food has not entered northern Gaza since October, according to the World Food Program.

For children the trauma is profound. Over 25,000 children have either lost a parent or become orphans, leaving them in deep emotional distress. Most children have experienced severe injuries, lost limbs, and face permanent disabilities.

In Ukraine, according to Care International's Rapid Gender Analysis Report (August 2024):

People with diverse vulnerabilities are continuously exposed to various forms of Gender Based Violence (GBV), including intimate partner violence (IPV), conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV), sex trafficking, and survival sex, among others, due to the war, displacement, and loss of income. Domestic violence, particularly IPV, remains prevalent in Ukraine and the problem has been significantly exacerbated by the war. Conflict Related Sexual Violence continues to be a major concern, where perpetrators use methods such as rape, forced nudity, threats of and attempted rape, and forcing people to watch the sexual abuse of loved ones.

The conflict in Sudan has resulted in the largest internal displacement crisis in the world with huge impacts on women and girls according to UN Women. The need for gender-based violence related services has increased by 100 percent since the beginning of the crisis - with most cases involving women and girls. Internally displaced women and girls are particularly vulnerable, with many cases of abuse going unreported due to a lack of adequate support and fears of stigma and retribution.

Sudan is also facing the worst levels of acute food insecurity ever recorded in the country. Women and girls are eating least and last. Access to health care services is another challenge, and an estimated 54,000 childbirths are expected in the next three months.

Women and girls also continue to be disproportionately impacted by the lack of safe, easily accessible, and affordable water, sanitation, and hygiene. And 74 per cent of school-aged girls, are currently out of school, increasing their risk of being subjected to harmful practices such as child marriage and female genital mutilation.

In Afghanistan, the prevalence of gender-based violence against women and girls, including through harmful traditional practices, was high prior to the Taliban takeover in 2021. Since then, it is reported to be even higher, particularly on the domestic front. Women and girls stripped of their hard-earned rights and are challenged to find alternative ways to continue their education and support each other amidst intensive repression by the Taliban and attempts at erasure of women from public life. The United Nations says two-thirds of Afghan women suffer from mental health issues and note an increase in suicide attempt rates among women.

In A Global Study on the Implementation of United Nations Security Council resolution 1325, additional effects on women and girls in conflict settings include disrupted education: many girls who were formerly encouraged to go to school, are not returning due to fear or because their families are afraid of abduction, murder, and other forms of violence.

Where the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 has been implemented, it has repeatedly demonstrated that women's equal and meaningful participation in peace and security efforts yields greater, more effective and sustainable commitments to peace and security. Furthermore, direct participation of diverse women, girls and marginalized groups is essential to creating and delivering a recovery agenda that is inclusive, equitable and gender-responsive.

Passionists International recommends full implementation of the Women's Peace and Security Agenda/Resolution 1325 in all areas of conflict and in the prevention of conflict.

We urge greater integration of the Peacebuilding Commission in the work of the Security Council, and increased representation of women and girls in peace negotiations and decision-making re: peacebuilding strategies.

We urge critical attention be paid to the pervasive and destructive experience of sexual violence in conflict and the needs of women and girls for shelter, safety and protection, trauma-informed treatment and psycho-social supports, medical care, legal resources, access to justice and financial support; and that funding and other resources be allocated for programs and services for survivors. It is their basic and fundamental human right.

We also urge reformation of the Security Council, including increased representation of Africa, Asia and Latin America as Permanent members, and continued exploration of proposals for alternatives to the veto which has become a great obstacle to the mission of the Security Council to prevent and end conflicts and promote peace.

We know that war is a great scourge on humanity and all of creation. We see the devastating effects on all of us, especially women and girls. Commitments to peace and to the Beijing Platform for Action are constituent of United Nation's principles and its determination to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, and to uphold the dignity, equality and human rights of all people. Passionists International joins you in this endeavor to collaborate in the pursuit of international peace, security and human rights for all.
