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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement* submitted by the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[4 June 2012]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

The problem of effective and full participation of women belonging to Turkish minority of Western Thrace in economic and political life of Greece

The UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities states that persons belonging to minorities have the right to participate in cultural, religious, social, economic and public life, and, the UN Declaration of the Right to Development recognizes a comprehensive economic, social, cultural and political process, which aims at the constant improvement of the well-being of the entire population and of all individuals on the basis of their active, free and meaningful participation in development and in the fair distribution of benefits resulting there from.

National or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities across many parts of Member States have been and are still being excluded from full and effective participation in economic life, and they are often poorly represented in economic, social and cultural life of their country. The legislation and policy-making processes on the full and effective participation of minorities in economic life often fail to address the needs of persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities, in most countries due to the lack of participation in the design and implementation. Positive measures or affirmative action which aim to address inequality that prevents persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities from meaningful and effective participation in economic life are often imperfect due to the non-recognition of minorities by Member States in their territory.

Discrimination against persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities is one of the largest barriers to the effective and full participation in economic life. The intersectional discrimination against persons belonging to minorities burden additional barriers and contribute to even further marginalization exclusion of minorities in all aspects of life. Though there are a large number of international, regional and domestic laws and policies adopted by Governments to address discrimination and the inequalities experienced by persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities, there is still discrimination and inequality in participation of these minorities in economic life.

The former UN Independent Expert on Minority Issues, Ms. Gay McDougall, stated in her report following her visit to Greece in September 2008 stated that women belonging to the Turkish Minority experience severe inequalities in access to education and consequent disproportionately high levels of illiteracy and unemployment. Most of minority women do not speak Greek, and therefore there are described as being confined to their homes and villages with few opportunities for employment or social interaction. Surveys which were made in different villages in Rhodope and Xanthi have proved that the minority women in Western Thrace cannot fully participate in economic life of the country due to the low level of education. According the surveys, 45% of the women who are between 21-30 ages and 38.9% of the women between 31 and 40 ages are housewives, and most of them are workers in their own small farmyard.

In the situation of deep economic crisis, unemployment rate in Greece raised 21.8 % in January 2012, the second highest rate among Member States. According to European Commission's Eurostat's unemployment statistics, compared with a year ago, the highest increases in unemployment rate were registered in Greece (14.7 % to 21.7 % between January 2011 and January 2012). Unemployed increased by 344,913 persons (a 46.6% rate of increase) compared with January 2011 and by 32,331 persons compared with December 2011 (a 3.1% rate of increase). Women have been more affected by unemployment than

men. In January 2012, the unemployment rate for women in Greece was 25.7 %, while the rate for men was 18.7%.

The highest unemployment rate among decentralized administrations in Greece was recorded in the Macedonia- Thrace, where the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace resides. The unemployment rate jumped to 22.6 % in January 2012, while the unemployment rate in Macedonia-Thrace decentralized administration was 16.7% in January 2011. In the period of deep economic crisis, economic conditions of the persons, including women belonging to the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace have deteriorated, and the unequal distribution of resources and services prevents the persons belonging to this minority from enjoying their economic and social rights.

In Western Thrace Turks Women's Assembly which was co-organized by Western Thrace Women Platform, Western Thrace Turks Solidarity Association and Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe in 18-19 May 2012 in Komotini, Greece, women belonging to the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace discussed that deep economic crisis with high unemployment rates in the region resulted loss of their jobs and deteriorated the basic conditions of their life. Since Macedonia-Thrace decentralized administration recorded highest rate of unemployment in Greece, most of persons belonging to Turkish Minority of Western Thrace lost their jobs. Most of the young minority men went abroad, mostly to other European countries for seasonal jobs in order to maintain the supply of their families. The division of families bears as an additional burden for minority women and this kind of division may result in declining relationship between fathers and their children.

The discrimination against persons belonging to the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace prevents the minority to take an effective role in economic life of the country. This intersectional discrimination against women of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace even further marginalizes the women in daily life in the region. Although Greece introduced a 0.5 % quota in 2008 (under Law 3647/2008) for persons belonging to the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace in order to redress the imbalances in the representation and participation of the Minority in economic life, this special measure has, thus far, not been implemented in Greece. The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI)'s 4th Monitoring Cycle Report on Greece in 2009 highlighted that a comprehensive long-term programme has not yet been established by the authorities to improve the integration of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace into the labour market, and it noted that reports indicate that the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace continue to be under-represented in the public sector and state-owned corporations.

Women are less visible in politics in Greece, and they are underrepresented in the political system, although the 1975 Constitution stipulated the "equality of rights between the sexes". Women are still socially inferior and politically marginalized. The persons belonging to the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace in Greece is inadequately represented in political life of the country. Under the current electoral system of reinforced proportionality, there is not any specific rule or a quota for the representation of the Turkish Minority. Furthermore, any political party and any independent candidate should get at least 3 % of the votes throughout the country in order to be represented in the Parliament, although they may have enough votes to get electoral seats in specific electoral districts. This provision makes it almost impossible for members of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace with an estimated population of 150.00 to be elected to the Parliament, if they independently run in elections.

The participation of women in political life at the regional level is slightly different from the national level. The balanced participation of men and women in the organizations and bodies of the public sector and the local authorities has been guaranteed by law since 2000, with a participation quota of 33% of each gender in the collective bodies of the abovementioned organizations. In addition, since 2001, a quota of at least 1/3 participation

of each gender in electoral lists for local elections is provided for. There has been a steady increase in number of women elected members to the prefecture and municipal posts. However, there is not any quota provided for the women belonging to the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace in order to encourage and promote the representation and participation of minority women in the parliament and the political life of the country. Today, there are only a small number of women who actively participate in the elected bodies at the local level.

In final declaration of Western Thrace Turks Women's Assembly, minority women called Greek authorities to raise awareness and make regulations in order to increase the participation of women persons belonging to Turkish Minority of Western Thrace in economic, social and political life. The minority women asked for distribution of EU grants to minority non-governmental organizations in order to protect the rights of women belonging to the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace.

In terms of full and effective participation of minority women in political life, the minority women asked for expanding the scope of national legislation in a way which would allow the minority women to equally participate in social, cultural and political life of the country. With regard to the effective participation of the minority women in Greek political life, the minority women asked Greek authorities to adopt special measure in order to promote the participation of Turkish women in political life of the country. The minority women asked the Greek Government to set a 50% women quota in local governments and abolish 3% electoral threshold for independent candidates in national parliament.
