



## Economic and Social Council

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### Commission on the Status of Women

#### Fifty-eighth session

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**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”: implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives**

### **Statement submitted by Al-khoei Foundation, 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.



## Statement

The Al-khoei Foundation is submitting this statement to appeal to the Member States to focus greater attention on issues relating to challenges and achievements in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls. Al-khoei Foundation reiterates that in order to attain the Millennium Development Goals, all discrimination towards women, including restricting their participation in all decision-making processes, must be totally eradicated. The attention and support of government officials is necessary if this is to be realized.

The Al-khoei Foundation has continued its work with women and young girls with the aim of enlightening and educating them through various seminars and workshops, in accordance with the requirements and goals of the Millennium Development Goals. The Al-khoei Foundation understands that one of the key factors affecting the growth of a healthy society and economy is the presence of high quality, relevant education. The Foundation is fully aware of the seriousness of this issue and is also aware of the facts. Although the ratio of females to males at all levels of education has increased, there still remains a gap in the quality of and importance placed on education for females.

The Al-khoei Foundation believes that it is important to address violence against women, as it is not only a violation of women's human right to protection from harm, to safety and to self-determination; it also limits the social and economic progress of families, communities and countries by reducing the participation of female victims in society. Women represent over 50 per cent of human society, and if the females within society are incapacitated physically, mentally or economically, they will be unable to fulfil their roles as mothers, wives and workers.

The Al-khoei Foundation firmly believes that our Islamic faith has provided us with the tools to effectively deal with this devastating social problem that not only affects individuals, but has a real impact on Muslim communities and wider society. Islam explicitly teaches kindness and compassion towards women in its Holy text, the Qur'an, and in Prophet Muhammad's traditions. These important values can also be found in the writings of the fourth Imam, Ali ibn al-Hussain, in his Treatise on Rights (Imam Ali ibn al-Hussain was the grandson of the Holy Prophet). Therefore, it is incumbent upon the Muslim community to uphold these divinely ordained rights.

It is an unfortunate reality that falsehoods attributed to the Islamic tradition continue to be used as a pretext for the suppression of women in the contemporary world. The Al-khoei Foundation takes responsibility, as a faith-based organization, for propagating the true teachings of Islam, which include the prescription and protection of women's rights to live safe from harm, and with opportunities for personal development and autonomy.

The efforts of the Al-khoei Foundation, in collaboration with other organizations, have prompted the traditional religious establishment in the holy city of Najaf, in Iraq, to mark an important day in the Islamic calendar, the first day of the month of Safar, to be the Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. The first day of the month of Safar was when the women and children of Prophet Muhammad's household went to Syria from Iraq after the tragic Battle of Karbala, in which Imam Hussain and the majority of the other men in the Prophet's family were martyred.

The Al-khoei Foundation is working with community activists and religious leaders on issues related to family violence, abuse and violence against women. They also raise awareness about the religious guidelines and legal tools available to deal with violence and its impact. Furthermore, the Foundation provides in-house religious advice and counselling for victims by activists and Imams and, when necessary, refer victims to professional and social services. The Foundation has held workshops to train community activists and Imams to deal with cases of violence. Our centres are open every day to help women who are victims of domestic violence.

The Al-khoei Foundation recognizes that in order to successfully eradicate all forms of violence against women, heavy emphasis must be placed on prevention schemes. The Foundation has organized a number of initiatives to educate the members of its communities about issues of domestic violence. It also organized an awareness campaign working with community leaders, Imams and school teachers.

Despite agreement acknowledged regarding the fundamental right to education, women and girls are faced with a mountain to climb when it comes to acquiring even the simplest degrees of education. This in turn hampers their growth and progression in society. Equality of access to all levels of education is critical to empowering the female population to assume positions of responsibility in economic, social and political aspects of their societies. Education causes a woman's potential to flourish, the fruits of which are improvements in health, nutrition and well-being of women and their families.

The Al-khoei Foundation also provides high quality education around the world at its schools for children in London, New York, Montreal, Paris, India, Pakistan and in the Middle East. Here we focus on building strong moral and ethical characters in our students, promoting respect for all of humanity.

The Al-khoei Foundation also recognizes the role of teachers in schools as professionals who may be able to recognize signs of abuse in girls and families and to educate them regarding the existence of violence against women and prevention. The Foundation currently runs two full-time primary and secondary schools. The Al-Zahra School focuses on the growth, development and education of girls, while the Al-Sadiq School focuses on the growth, development and education of boys, which currently caters to 400 student but boasts the capability of serving 550 students.

The Al-khoei Foundation also runs a part-time, once-a-week "Saturday school", the "Al-Salam school"; it is open to both boys and girls, and encourages the education of morals and ethics needed for the healthy growth of these young individuals in today's society. We currently have 350 students attending and hope to increase our student list. In New York, the "Al-Iman school" currently caters for both genders and, like the branch in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, it offers education at the primary and secondary level. Pakistan is home to our Al-Kawthar University, which offers a high quality level of education for those wishing to further their studies. The Foundation also has a part-time school in Paris for both genders and continues its hard work in guiding and educating youth.

The Al-khoei Foundation has also initiated and runs several youth groups for young women and men, including a weekly youth club for young boys. The youth groups organize educational classes, lectures, workshops and mentoring to educate youth about their rights in society and how to respect each other. The youth groups

also work on building confidence and self-esteem to enable participants to be agents of change in society and to effectively tackle issues in their own lives.

In addition to our educational achievements, the Al-khoei Foundation believes that physical activity is important to nurture a healthy mind and body and to provide the opportunity for wholesome recreation and development. Physical activities have included self-defence classes for women that have been run in coordination with the local police.

The Al-khoei Foundation has also worked in partnership with other Islamic organizations on the Imams and Mosques Advisory Board to produce documentation and guidelines to raise standards in places of worship, which include toolkits to empower women and the family. The Imams and Mosques Advisory Board has a national advisory role and has a membership of more than 600 community centres and mosques in the United Kingdom.

A communication skills course, which runs throughout the year, provides families and spouses with the communication skills to discuss and resolve problems before they escalate to trigger physical and violent conflict. Internationally, projects of the Al-khoei Foundation include the Al-Kawthar project in Iraq, which supports the economic independence of Iraqi women and orphans by providing microcredit schemes for widows, the sponsorship of orphans and educational support.

Furthermore, funds were raised to dig wells in villages in Africa to help women obtain clean water safely nearby and to be able to rely on themselves, rather than ask for outside help.

There are many reasons for the abuse of women, be it cultural or otherwise, which we cannot allow to be used as a justification for violence. However, we believe that more attention needs to be paid to research the role that sexual objectification of women in public television broadcasting, films, pornography, magazines, advertising and computer games can play in undermining the status and equality of women. In times of conflict, women are often targeted and subjected to sexual harassment and rape. Therefore, we call upon States to recognize this issue, punish the perpetrators and educate military personnel.

The Al-khoei Foundation believes that there is a strong link between intoxicant abuse and cases of domestic and non-domestic violence against women and other family members, so we call upon States to investigate the role of alcohol and drug addiction and to provide support and rehabilitation for victims.

The status of women is affected by their rights in society, so Member States should act to eradicate all forms of discrimination against women in the areas of education, employment and political rights. Females should not be denied, under any cultural pretext, the right to education. When women have the need or the wish to engage in employment, there should not be any obstacles based on gender discrimination.

Outreach and interfaith — Al-khoei Foundation encourages young girls to take an active part in interfaith debates and workshops by visiting local schools and hosting open discussions for local schools and universities, as well as inviting neighbours of mosques and surrounding areas to participate in question-and-answer sessions regarding Islam. This will increase the level of discussion, and open

education will help create greater tolerance of each other's faith and better understand our own faith.

Al-khoei Foundation calls for the implementation of justice in the context of promoting women's rights in Muslim countries. We have requested more and better resources for women's empowerment initiatives, both at the governmental and the civil society level. The Foundation is highly concerned with the lack of awareness about women's education and training, especially in relation to refugee and displaced women and girls in post-conflict areas of the world.

The Al-khoei Foundation calls upon all Member States to put in place safeguards against all forms of abuse, wherever and whenever they exist, and to take active steps to educate and counter discriminatory and literal interpretations of religious texts or cultural norms that can lead to abhorrent crimes, such as "honour killings". We urgently call upon Member States and non-governmental organizations to make provisions for education regarding the treatment of women and their rights.

While religious values and cultural norms can enrich lives and provide great moral and spiritual support for communities across the world, we need to actively combat all abuse in the name of religion and culture. The Al-khoei Foundation calls upon all Member States to enhance their policies to implement the Millennium Development Goals. This should include the development of new safeguards, laws and legislation.

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