



## Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General  
17 November 2015

Original: English

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### Commission on the Status of Women

#### Sixtieth session

14-24 March 2016

**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and  
to 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 ISIS: Women’s International Cross-Cultural Exchange, a non-governmental organization in consultative 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.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

2016, the Commission on the Status of Women priority theme is Women's empowerment and its link to sustainable development. Being an organization that works with women and survivors of armed conflict, ISIS: Women International Cross Cultural Exchange (2002) pays close attention to the subject of empowerment and how it should be approached in order to bring about sustainable peace and development especially in post conflict communities.

There is no single issue whose solution will address the full nature of women's empowerment — violence is related to the economic, political, sense of self, and cultural aspects; the economic cannot be solved without the political and social; and so on. ISIS: Women's Cross Cultural Exchange therefore offers a range of learning lessons about empowerment that have been gathered through years of listening and documenting women's experiences of post conflict reconstruction

To all member states and donor agencies, Women's empowerment for sustainable development should enshrine and prioritise the following core feminist aspects:

- Embrace a full cycle approach to feminist oriented human development within the context of conflict and post conflict recovery. The approach should be human centred with a human face and a human touch. The approach should put women at the centre, carefully building their agency to engage as actors rather than as beneficiaries and making a full cycle linkage from the personal through to community and national to international level.

- Restoring women's dignity. Right to Bodily Integrity is a key contributing factor for the well-being and empowerment of women and girls who continue to live with a high burden of gynaecological and psychological ailments that further deprive them of their ability to engage in productive work and leadership. Without healing of body, mind and spirit women's empowerment cannot be achieved.

- Building women's capacity/ skills, political, economic and social. Capacity and skills building should start with what people know and then combine learning, reflection, action, lobbying and reflection again. The process of reflection and dialogue contributes to a process of enhancing the consciousness, identity and confidence of the participants and thus acts as a catalyst for re-strategizing and redefining struggles and alternatives.

- Enhance skills for self-reliance. Ensure that all development and training initiatives encompass all aspects of a woman's life and respond to their physical, psychological, social, economic and spiritual needs within the socio-political environment, thus ensuring that they gain the necessary knowledge, skills and experience required to ensure that they develop.

- Knowledge: The Global Peace and Security architecture especially with regard to women survivors of conflict and post conflict reconstruction should realign its policies and knowledge banks on the lived experiences of women survivors of violence. Women's ways of knowing and knowledge generated through exchange visits, personal stories and testimonies have been able to shift norms, build resilience specifically with regard to stigma, taboos and denial about tolerance for violence against women, and contribute during the conflict.

In light of the above, ISIS: Women's International Cross Cultural Exchange calls for a blend of transformative approaches that will further facilitate the transition to sustainable peace and development.

**All member states are reminded and called upon to:**

Significantly cut back on military expenditure and divert more resources to financing commitments towards women's empowerment such as education and reproductive health services. Militarism only serves to uphold and perpetuate structural inequalities that in turn operate to disenfranchise women and girls from public goods, entrenching exclusion and marginalization.

Empower and work directly with community women peace builders and women organizations to strengthen their capacity to monitor and respond to the increasing threats posed by violent extremist groups and human traffickers. Emphasis should be geared towards supporting local women to harness their own local home grown solutions for peace.

Specifically in Africa, women's empowerment should put more emphasis on improving women's livelihoods, economic interventions and reparations for survivors of violence especially in post conflict communities. ISIS: Women International Cross Cultural Exchange research has shown that without immediate economic empowerment, women and girls quickly descend into more high-risk work like survival sex.

Reconcile traditional and contemporary legal mechanisms that address legal aid services for survivors of violence. Nation states should collaborate directly with community women's organizations in the design and implementation of legal empowerment initiatives that build women's confidence and access to legal systems.

Re-align all national laws and policies in line with the Sustainable Development Goals especially goals 10, 5 and 16 as a way of fast tracking women's empowerment. The goals hold the promise of a more just world and achieving them is going to require committed top national and international leadership.

Establish regular progress reports about the implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 National Action Plans through parliament and other forums with clear targets and indicators to enable its tracking. As ISIS: Women International Cross Cultural Exchange, we are sure that the implementation of National Action Plans will definitely fast track national commitments to women's empowerment.

Focus on strengthening women's capacity to express voice, needs and claim rights and accountability within the context of post conflict.

Focus on promoting attitude change of negative societal norms, values & practices.

Women's empowerment especially in leadership and government should go beyond the numbers. Whereas it is good to significantly achieve parity in terms of women and men representation and whereas quotas for political offices and affirmative action are good practices in women's empowerment, what is more important is to move beyond numbers and achieve substantive participation.

Women's empowerment should avoid grouping and essentializing women into a one approach fits all. For example not all women are mothers, nor are all women wives. Every woman has a personal agenda and mission. Women are a very diverse group working in diverse fields. Each woman brings different contributions, talents, skills, thoughts and knowledge to the struggle.

Empowerment of women does not in any way imply disempowerment of boys. There is enough power and resources for both men and women.

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