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Statement submitted by Tabitha Cumi 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.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Global trends in terrorism, the insurgency plaguing several African countries, maiming, raping and the recent abduction of over two hundred girls from Chibok in North East Nigeria and in other places have dealt a deadly blow to the efforts made over the years by Governments, International Development Partners and Civil Society Organizations to enrol girls and retain them in schools until completion, especially in conflict areas. In view of the insurgency in several parts of Nigeria, certain areas of the countries are assumed to be relatively safe and have witnessed a large number of Internally Displaced Persons from the affected areas. Due to the high cost of living in the metropolitan areas, these displaced persons settle in the rural areas that are more affordable. We presume this is also the trend in other African countries facing the same challenge. Security agents have identified hard to reach communities as safe hideouts for criminals who sometimes relate with unsuspecting girls. It is no longer news in Nigeria that teenage female suicide bombers have been groomed and used to detonate bombs around the country, which is alien to our culture, tradition, and religious beliefs. The fear of young unsuspecting girls being recruited or lured into acts of terrorism and these communities serving as breeding ground for female terrorists is of great concern and requires urgent attention from global leaders, state actors, international development partners, non-governmental organizations and community based organizations.

We are gradually losing the battle that we were close to winning on girl's education due to the current situation where parents and communities are no longer interested in sending their daughters to school due to fear of abduction, rape, or recruitment as suicide bombers. Adolescent girls themselves are lacking the zeal to resist some ills that come their ways. There is an urgent need to restore the confidence of the girl child in insurgent areas to understand that they can complete their education and brace themselves to face the current challenges without losing hope.

We advocate for community safe spaces for girls in areas affected by insurgency. The need for community safe spaces for girls cannot be overemphasized because even before conflicts erupt or natural disasters occur, the adolescent girl would automatically be transformed to an adult. This transition from childhood to adulthood is shaped by rigid expectations, losing all her childhood benefits. In conflict and displacement settings, the institutions, systems, and community cohesion that normally support girls' development, protect them from violence, and uphold their human rights are weakened or destroyed. Family and community structures break down, while traditional and social norms disintegrate, affecting adolescent girls in unique and devastating ways. Adolescent girls in humanitarian settings should not just be seen as a vulnerable group; these girls possess an enormous capacity for becoming a source of transformation in their families and communities even in crisis.

Growing evidence supports that investing in girls' economic and social empowerment can reduce their risks of experiencing violence and is an effective pathway to sustainable development. Likewise, conflict and crisis situations often lead to shifting gender roles that open up possibilities for positive social changes, resulting in an opportunity for gender norms to change for the better. Creating safe spaces brings girls together to learn and arm themselves with the survival skills needed for such a time as they are in. We are all aware that public spaces are usually

dominated by men and boys hence girls wouldn't have a space to call their own. Safe spaces can be a platform for building the esteem and confidence of a girl in a crisis period. In a time like this when refugee and internally displaced persons camps are springing up everywhere, we urge and appeal that safe spaces for girls be introduced in the various camps to afford an adolescent girls a space where they can share experiences and encourage one another, responding to the issues affecting their lives and communities.

We appeal that creating safe places for girls in crisis areas become pivotal to sustainable development in the upcoming Commission on the Status of Women 60.
