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Statement submitted by “Women and Modern World” Social Charitable Centre and Union Women’s Center, non-governmental organizations 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

The Women and Modern World Social Charitable Center is a civil society organization established in 1999. It is a volunteer, non-governmental, non-profit organization. It is active in capacity building for women, education, health, protection, support, peace building, economic empowerment and poverty reduction in areas of conflict and wars in South Caucasus. It has consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council and participated in the sixtieth sessions of the Economic and Social Council as well as in sessions of the Human Rights Council in Geneva.

The gap in the levels of education in the South Caucasus reinforces and broadens the gender gap in the labour market. The participation of women in the workforce in the region has decreased partly due to the increased migration of rural women. A major goal today should be to reintegrate women into the workforce, while ensuring relevant legislation does not only exist but is efficiently implemented to guarantee full participation of women in the labour market. An important step toward mainstreaming women into the labour force would be to expand access to childcare, care for the elderly etc. Moreover, the feminization of migration requires greater gender sensibility in policies on migration, as women migrant workers are important contributors to socioeconomic development. The movement of a significant number of women migrant workers may be facilitated by means of fraudulent or irregular documentation and sham marriages, sometimes even by the very technologies that enhance important freedoms.

Azerbaijan has long acknowledged this. In its brief period as the world's first Muslim democratic republic, true to the fundamental tenets of Islam, it introduced gender equality under the law and women's suffrage in 1918, well before all but a half dozen other countries. Today women's legal rights equal men's although they face many of the same traditional social pressures felt by women around the world.

At the time of achieving independence, Azerbaijan was a low-income country striving to transition to the market economy. Despite the burden of the unresolved conflict, the country managed to restore economic stability and achieved high rates of growth. This growth was mainly fuelled by revenues from the oil industry although the government has acknowledged the need for creating employment and growth in the non-oil sectors.

Achieving gender equality is one of the United Nation's highest priorities and is considered as a necessary precondition for fully achieving human development. Gender equality recognizes the individual — regardless of sex — as the central figure of societal progress and enables the nation to set on a long and thorny path to democratization and the nation's sustainable development. The legal framework and policies pursued by the Government of Azerbaijan create enabling environment for women to exercise their rights and advance their position in the society. Since independence, Azerbaijan has ratified almost all essential international documents on the protection of women's rights. However, in Azerbaijan, like in many other countries, there is a gap between legislative acts and their enforcement. Disparities observed in the level of men's and women's participation in economic, social and political life are, to a large extent, accounted for by patriarchal attitudes and the stereotypes regarding women roles and responsibilities in the family and society, which constitute a significant impediment to the implementation of the legal provisions and are a root cause of women's disadvantaged position in public life, the labour market, and other areas.

In Azerbaijan's capital city Baku, it is not hard to find successful women who run their own businesses or hold high positions in companies and government

institutions. So it is easy to forget that in rural areas of the country, many women are still deprived of the opportunity to actively participate in social and economic life.

According to our estimates, at the end of 2016, the population of Azerbaijan was 9,962,787 people. Men: 4,932,118 people (estimated as of December 31, 2016) Women: 5 030 669 people (estimated as of December 31, 2016). 51% of the population live in cities. According to statistics, 50.2% of the population of Azerbaijan is women. The dynamics of the growth of the rural population of Azerbaijan exceeds the urban indicators by almost 2 times.

In the southern part of Azerbaijan, near the border of Iran, cases of early marriage are prevalent — over 1,200 in 2014-2016 alone. Driven by poverty, stereotypes, tradition, and community pressure, this prevalence not only affects women's participation in society, but also has a direct effect on maintaining poverty in the area.

At present, the Azerbaijani woman occupies one of the highest positions in the society. However, despite the successes and achievements, there are a number of difficulties that our women face. As in every state, the level of women's participation in the decision-making process in Azerbaijan does not satisfy us. Naturally, a number of reasons contribute to this. First of all, the occupation of 20% of Azerbaijani territory by Armenia caused unwanted social consequences.

In order to create equal opportunities for employment for men and women, gender considerations should be at the centre of any economic and social policies. Azerbaijan has a well-developed legislative base for protection of women's economic rights. The Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan guarantees its citizens gender equality and freedom from all kinds of discrimination in all spheres of life. National legislation stipulates equal rights of men and women to engage in all types of economic activity, inherit, own and sell property, and receive bank loans.

Azerbaijan is currently going through a period of economic growth. Sustainable development and elimination of poverty in the rural areas constitute one of the priorities of national development efforts. The Azerbaijani state repeatedly expressed its commitment to gender equality, protection of women's rights and support for women's involvement in decision making on all levels. However rural women continue experiencing obstacles in economic empowerment and community based activism. No development strategy that marginalizes women can succeed; to stifle their rights, hamper their work and deny their contributions not only demeans them, but prevents progress. In every aspect of her life, a woman's autonomy, freedom, and opportunities are said by the degree to which her nation's laws uphold gender equality. Central to social and economic inequalities faced by women in Muslim majority societies are Family Laws, which dictate power relations between spouses, parents and children.

Georgia is an agricultural country with a medium-low income level. According to the new census, the total population of Georgia is 3,729,500 people. In rural areas, 1,589,100 people live, and 52 per cent of the rural population are women. A number of successful political and economic reforms were carried out in the country. However, women may experience difficulties in developing their economic potential, in finding and retaining work and in managing or setting up their own business. These difficulties are most clearly manifested in rural areas. Surveys of various groups of rural women have revealed the existence of unfavourable conditions for women in local labour markets. Women are less likely than men to own land. In addition, women are more isolated than men from current economic

reforms because they do not have access to information flows, financial resources, proper property and equality in the labour market.

Social Charitable Center Women and Modern World and Union Women's Center Georgia is looking forward to the upcoming 62st United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, which will provide a space to discuss and challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls, raise awareness of economic inequality imposed.

We call for all member states to adopt the ethos of Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls in all national laws.
