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Statement submitted by Aid Organization, 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

Aid Organization has the honor to submit this statement to the Secretary General on the occasion of the sixty-fourth session of the Commission on the Status of Women at the United Nations Headquarters in New York. Aid Organization is a Bangladesh-based non-governmental organization providing humanitarian and social aid to those in need of technical support, training, education, and financial assistance to alleviate poverty and advance human potential. Aid Organization's work highlights the special needs of women and girls who wish to move out of poverty or from situations of vulnerability or abuse. Since its inception in 1998, Aid Organization has been active in humanitarian and social work in both urban and rural-based settings, succeeding in empowering women and girls, heightening community engagement, and promoting dignity and gainful employment, while reducing health and environmental risks to communities, including risks caused by climate change.

The Commission on the Status of Women is significant to Aid Organization for a number of reasons. First, the mandate of the Commission – promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women – is also core to Aid Organization's mandate and operating principles. Second, Aid Organization received special consultative status at the United Nations Economic and Social Commission in 2017; hence, we are grateful to participate as a newly-accredited non-government organization. It is in this light that Aid Organization introduces itself to the Commission, the Member States, and the wider non-government organization community attending this prestigious and important meeting. Aid Organization considers our presence at this high-level meeting to be an honour, but also an opportunity to shed light on the humble and important ground-level work our non-government organization is doing in Bangladesh. We also wish to highlight how Aid Organization supports Sustainable Development Goal 5: Gender Equality in a manner that is cross-cutting to all 17 Sustainable Development Goals. Aid Organization also endeavors to promote a nexus between advancing women's rights and the challenges women face in the climate-change context.

On 14 October 2019, Ms. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) made comments on the International Day of Rural Women. Ms. Mlambo-Ngcuka noted that, "Millions of rural women and girls around the world are building essential climate resilience at home, at work, and in their communities. They play significant roles in agriculture, food security, nutrition, and the management of land and natural resources. In fact, globally, one in three employed women works in agriculture, with indigenous women in particular safeguarding land and knowledge. Women's critical role in these aspects underlines the value of supporting their equal access to land and resources, financing, infrastructure and services, markets, and decision-making power. Conversely, when land and natural resources are threatened by climate change, environmental degradation, or social and economic shocks, rural women's and girls' lives and livelihoods are put in jeopardy."

Climate change is a matter of women's rights, but also an issue of physical safety in Bangladesh. According to water policy expert Robert Glennon, a three-foot rise in sea level around Bangladesh would submerge almost 20 per cent of the country and displace more than 30 million people – and the actual rise by 2100 could be significantly more (Robert Glennon, *The Unfolding Tragedy of Climate Change in Bangladesh* Scientific American, 2017). Vulnerability is not a problem unique to Bangladesh. In May 2019, Forbes Magazine noted that climate change is exacerbating extreme weather events, recognizing that the world's most vulnerable children will

bear the brunt of these disasters and that women remain the responsible actors for protecting families.

Aid Organization is a non-government organization principally staffed by women. Our staff are aware that women in local communities are the most at-risk in climate disasters. In the developing world, women are responsible for 60-80 per cent of subsistence agriculture; hence, climate change affects local families' ability to put food on the table. For a number of reasons, women in developing countries are often not taught to swim, and their mobility is limited by caregiving responsibilities and traditional dress. The lack of reproductive health care in the developing world compounds these problems because it is associated with poor health outcomes for women and children, as well as higher rates of poverty. These challenges make women vulnerable, but also mean that women are the key to creating solutions.

Aid Organization has run several climate change-related projects, one of which was a tree-planting programme for disaster mitigation. This project involved community training on: climate change effects; disaster management; environmental awareness; tree plantation; livestock and poultry management during disasters; cultivation of flood-resistant crops including disasters; school-based programmes; database creation on climate change disaster vulnerability; development of contingency plans; generating funds for protection from climate change effects; training on disaster management issues; risk and rewards mapping; establishment of early warning centres; provision of workshops on the role and responsibilities of local administration and line ministers on climate change; and training of community leaders, schools, and civil society on climate change effects.

Since 1999, Aid Organization has run projects on the supply of safe water and sanitation management. Aid Organization's projects have organized visits to hundreds of homes, providing project beneficiaries with training on the importance of safe drinking water, personal hygiene, and prevention and mitigation of water-borne diseases, as well as checking to ensure access to arsenic-free drinking water. Aid Organization also works with the government of Bangladesh to install tube wells in communities as needed.

Aid Organization offers an ongoing life-skills training programme for women, as well as a leadership development training programme for young women. This service is provided to young women in Barisal Sadar Upazilla of the Barisal district, with the objective of establishing a better understanding of women's rights and providing a working standard to empower women. Aid Organization has used a "train the trainers" model, whereby training was provided to groups of 10 disadvantaged women, who returned to their communities. These committee founders received training on technical education, primary knowledge about health and healthy lifestyles, reproductive health care, and pre- and post-natal health care. These women are therefore better enabled to raise their voices against child marriage and other acts of oppression, so that women are better enabled to play active roles in decision-making. Aid Organization has applied the same model to address maternal mortality and child mortality by training and educating pregnant mothers and children. All of these efforts have spillover effects for the ability of women to be more responsive in negative climatic situations.

Aid Organization calls to attention the words of the Paris Agreement, which requested a focus on "gender equality, empowerment of women, and intergenerational equity".

Aid Organization operates on a skills, education, and development-based framework, moving forward from a prior focus as a charity. Aid Organization's work takes place at the grassroots-level, providing humanitarian assistance, capacity building, and other support to help the poorest and most humble of the Bangladesh

population to achieve their potential. Aid Organization's work supports the three dimensions of human development – human assets, economic vulnerability, and income per capita – a focus that is important to sustainable human development, as Bangladesh moves to a projected 2024 graduation from least developed country status.

Aid Organization has helped 43,000 poor families in 25 Upazillas of nine districts across the country, in partnership with the government of Bangladesh, non-government organizations, and the United Nations, providing over 27 forms of assistance, ranging from projects as diverse as prevention of child marriage and education of women and girls (encouraging girls to stay in school) to various income-generating activity programmes, programmes to train women to cope with domestic violence, and projects to help communities dig wells to provide fresh water, while providing education about hygiene and water safety. Aid Organization also teamed up with Grameen Bank of Bangladesh to provide bank accounts for street children. Aid Organization's work currently spans nine districts, connecting 2,244 disadvantaged individuals, mostly women and children.

Aid Organization is pleased to attend this meeting and looks forward to continuing practical humanitarian and social project work that complements the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, while supporting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
