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Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

Written statement* submitted by the Maarij Foundation for Peace and Development, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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Crippling costs of gender inequality

If development is not engendered, it is endangered

Nairobi, Kenya – Gender inequality is costing sub-Saharan Africa on average \$US95 billion a year, peaking at US\$105 billion in 2014– or six percent of the region's GDP – jeopardizing the continent's efforts for inclusive human development and economic growth, according to the Africa Human Development Report 2016: *Advancing Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Africa*, published today by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

"If gender gaps can be closed in labour markets, education, health, and other areas, then poverty and hunger eradication can be accelerated", said UNDP Administrator Helen Clark at the launch today, attended by Kenya's President Uhuru Kenyatta at the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD) VI.

Achieving gender equality and women's empowerment is the right thing to do, and is a development imperative", Helen Clark said.

The UNDP report analyses the political, economic and social drivers that hamper African women's advancement and proposes policies and concrete actions to close the gender gap. These include addressing the contradiction between legal provisions and practice in gender laws; breaking down harmful social norms and transforming discriminatory institutional settings; and securing women's economic, social and political participation.

The cost of gender inequality

Deeply-rooted structural obstacles such as unequal distribution of resources, power and wealth, combined with social institutions and norms that sustain inequality are holding African women, and the rest of the continent, back. The report estimates that a 1 percent increase in gender inequality reduces a country's human development index by 0.75 percent.

The Human Development Index (HDI) is a summary measure of average achievement in key dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, being knowledgeable and have a decent standard of living

While the continent is rapidly closing the gender gap in primary education enrolment, African women achieve only 87 percent of the human development outcomes of men, driven mainly by lower levels of female secondary attainment, lower female labor force participation and high maternal mortality.

The report states that while 61 percent of African women are working they still face economic exclusion as their jobs are underpaid and undervalued, and are mostly in the informal sector.

African women hold 66 percent of the all jobs in the non-agricultural informal sector and only make 70 cents for each dollar made by men. Only between 7 and 30 percent of all private firms have a female manager.

In a key finding, the report estimates that total annual economic losses due to gender inequality in the labour market have averaged US\$95 billion per year since 2010 in sub-Saharan Africa and could be as high as US\$105 billion, or 6 percent of the region's GDP in 2014.

Social norms are a clear obstacle to African women's progress, limiting the time women can spend in education and paid work, and access to economic and financial assets. For instance, African women still carry out 71 percent of water collecting translating to 40 billion hours a year, and are less likely to have bank accounts and to access credit.

African women's health is also severely affected by harmful practices such as under-age marriage and sexual and physical violence, and high maternal mortality - the most at-risk women being those of childbearing age. According to the report, a 1 percentage point rise in adolescent birth rate increases the overall adult female mortality rate by about 1.1 percentage points.

“With existing gender disparities, achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and Africa’s Agenda 2063 would remain an aspiration, and not a reality”, said UNDP Africa Director Abdoulaye Mar Dieye. “Closing the gender gap would not only set Africa on a double-digit economic growth track, but would also significantly contribute to meeting its development goals.”

Pathways to gender equality and women’s empowerment

Addressing gender inequality requires an all-of-government and all-of-society approach, taking into account established linkages between women’s social wellbeing and economic opportunities for more productive lives.

The report proposes four strategic pathways to greater gender equality and women’s empowerment – adopting legal reforms, building national capacity to accelerate women’s involvement in decision-making, adopting multi-sectoral approaches in promoting gender equality and women’s empowerment, and accelerating women’s ownership of assets and management of resources.

The report further recommends six enabling actions to fast-track the achievement of gender equality and women’s empowerment, and by extension, the Sustainable Development Goals and Africa’s Agenda 2063:

Using gender equality as an organising policy lens for all development planning and implementation to ensure that gender equality and women’s empowerment is a deliberate design feature.

Directly tackling destructive social norms as African leaders can no longer abdicate from their responsibility to address harmful social norms in a straightforward and unambiguous manner.

Planning and budget prioritisation for gender equality that foregoes short-term politically and economically expedient decision-making, and instead links immediate priorities to a long-term vision mapping out a more inclusive and empowering development trajectory.

Ensuring adaptive national institutions to drive a strong, proactive and responsible social framework that develops policies, follows through implementation and readjusts in the face of shifting evidence and the changing needs of society.

Giving value to data for improved decision-making and informed policy change and mid-course corrections. Data disaggregation beyond national-level is critical to gauge impact at regional and local-levels.

Engaging in regional and South-South Cooperation in designing and implementing gender-focused policies and initiatives to share tools, strategies and experiences across sectors.

Achieving gender equality and women’s empowerment cannot be achieved without forging alliances among development actors - government, civil society, private sector and other development partners.

In this perspective the report proposes two major initiatives, the establishment of an African Women’s Investment Bank and the implementation of Gender Seal certification to promote gender equality standards in workplaces.

The report is clear that countries that invest more in gender equality and women’s empowerment are doing better on human development. To ensure Africa’s inclusive growth it is critical that half the continent’s population – girls and women - play transformative roles.