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Statement submitted by Women and Modern World Centre, 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

Expansion of women's rights and opportunities, and its connection with sustained development in Azerbaijan

In the field of foreign policy, Azerbaijan has designated its integration into the world community a priority. The geopolitical changes associated with the breakup of one of the superpowers at the end of the twentieth century have led to numerous wars and ethnic conflicts. A massive number of people have died as a result of those conflicts, and an even greater number have become refugees or persons internally displaced from their native lands. The South Caucasus is one unstable region in which there have been numerous ethnic conflicts. One need only note ethnic conflicts such as those between Armenia and Azerbaijan, between Georgia and Abkhazia and between Georgia and South Ossetia in which the peace and security that historically existed between peoples living as good neighbours have been replaced by, inter alia, enmity and mistrust.

According to statistics provided by the State Committee of Azerbaijan, the population of Azerbaijan in March 2014 stood at 9,636,000, and 50.6% of the population, or 4,424,000 persons, consisted of women. Women account for 49.5% of the employed population. Azerbaijan's transition to a new course of economic development and progress in many areas of social life has resulted in women taking a more active role in business. More often than not, women work in the sphere of services, either in education or medicine. Only 2.8% of women hold management positions in Azerbaijan. Some 53.2% of the populace lives in cities, and 46.8%, in outlying areas.

Women bear the brunt of the responsibility for the fate of their families. Many families have lost breadwinners in war; many women have husbands who, in search of work, have emigrated to countries of the near and far abroad; and many homes end up broken for purely economic reasons. Many women, for lack of information or appropriate training, are unable to apply their skills or find employment.

This is the environment in which, over the last decade, it has been more than urgent to achieve gender balance.

Employment, small business, and agriculture are the primary elements of economic and social development and must be accessible to all. Meanwhile, in rural areas, women's opportunities to participate in economic activities and women's access to resources are, as before, extremely limited.

The status of women can be seen through the prism of the traditional distribution of family duties. It is widely known that in Azerbaijan, the woman comes into her own primarily as a wife and mother. According to a study by the International Finance Corporation (IFC), only 12% of female graduates of institutions of higher learning receive a business education, as opposed to 33% of male graduates.

In addition, there is a lack of general education among women in Azerbaijan. "The lack of education among young women", a gender specialist explains, "is the fundamental reason for inequality. When they become adults, they encounter inequality not only in the workplace, but also in the society as a whole. Most positions that require decision-making will not be open to them, because they do not

have enough education”. Moreover, women typically do not participate in decision-making at certain levels and in certain fields, and that is the biggest problem on the path to sustained development. As a result, we can point to myriad obstacles blocking women’s participation in the use of natural resources.

They include the following:

- the lack of access to education and training;
- women’s limited input in terms of planning and decision-making;
- limited rights in terms of land ownership and holding;
- the lack of gender-specific data and gender-impact research, both which are necessary for the implementation of special gender strategies;
- the general absence of gender consciousness

The essence of the problem is the traditionally patriarchal way of the world, according to which the process of strategic decision-making is the exclusive province of men.

Statistics notwithstanding, however, the status of businesswomen in Azerbaijan is far behind that of businesswomen in the rest of the world. In Azerbaijan, the fair sex faces difficulties in obtaining access to financial resources, to systems for business connections, and to markets, both when setting up a business and when expanding it.

At present, reducing poverty is a universal problem facing the world community.

In Azerbaijan, as in most countries of the world, solving the problem of poverty is being heralded as a task of the highest priority, and because of the existence of “mentality” barriers in choice of specialty and job placement, women have a lower status and lower wages than do men. Existing stereotypes also inhibit the development of entrepreneurship among women, and of the 69% of women involved in private enterprise, only 3% have their own business, the main obstacles being as follows:

- the absence of start-up capital;
- limited access to micro and macro loans;
- lack of information and skills.

Women entrepreneurs engaged in business are still perceived as atypical. Difficulties often arise in the personal/family sphere for poor women living in rural areas. Most women regarded as vulnerable, whose income is not sufficient to overcome poverty, are unemployed.

Households headed by women constitute the poorest groups of the population. Women who are not working, but who have children, cannot fill the gaps in the family budget.

United Nations Population Fund. On one hand, the Labour Code protects a mother’s rights by, inter alia, ensuring a flexible schedule to enable the feeding of and care for children and providing maternity leave. On the other hand, the Labour Code creates conditions in which the employer is forced to bear additional expenses

when hiring a woman. The so-called legislative patronage of women strengthens the patriarchal model of Azerbaijan society.

As is known, the oil-and-gas sector generates 48.7% of Azerbaijan's GDP (2011). But women account for just 10% of those employed in that sector.

The woman entrepreneur must overcome more barriers.

Despite the plans of the government and the initiatives of international organizations, only 17% of women are engaged in entrepreneurial activities. Such a low figure is due to the following:

- Limited access to information in outlying regions of the country because of the low level of use of the Internet;
- A shortage of instructional programmes and training courses for those who wish to start their own business;
- High interest rates attending the acquisition of the initial financing for a business.

For women, poverty means much more than just a low level of income or the absence of an income. It also presumes the absence of the monitoring and control of income, even within the family. It means lost opportunities, because women do not have sufficient authority or voting rights. It also means that women lose a great deal because no one counts on their economic input at all. Their work is regarded as something of little value, they provide no services that are regarded as necessary in the least and, to make matters worse, women are inadequately represented at the decision-making level. In some rural regions, the economic, social and infrastructural barriers, as well as discriminatory practices, underlie the fact that traditional economic indicators are considerably lower. Women have limited experience in matters of economic rights and legal awareness. The level of discussion of that problem is extremely low in outlying regions.

In many communities, women serve as the primary workforce and are the breadwinners, and, consequently, they play a key role in the provision of food and nutrition for the family, in income growth and in the development of the informal sector as a whole, as well as in the preservation of the environment. Effectively, women are charged with protecting the environment and ensuring the sensible, sustainable distribution of resources within the framework of households and the community.

The real unemployment rate in Azerbaijan is around 12%. According to our sources, there are more than half a million unemployed persons in Azerbaijan. Half of the unemployed population consists of refugees.

Every other family member is paying on a high-interest bank loan.

Azerbaijan is in the process of relaxing tax law, which is helping to create new small and medium-sized enterprises and is attracting investments in the country's economy, which is thereby creating new jobs. Real opportunities also need to be created for NGOs to cooperate with government agencies that would like to do so.

Today's level of education will stimulate tomorrow's economy.

We all know that unjust war is under way in the world today.

By and large, it is women and children who suffer and die in such war. We are facing that very a problem. Among the conflicts of the last decade that have been the most difficult to resolve is the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The Karabakh conflict began in 1988 with the first meeting. As a result, the prior war footing and broad external support of Armenia enabled, with time, the capture of 20% of Azerbaijan territory. As has always been the case in history, the war shattered the fate of millions of people, did harm to the economies of both States, and precluded the possibility of cooperation. It is obvious that the largest countries of the world have financed the parties in conflict. To them, it is “just doing business”.

I feel that the policies of the leading countries of the world must stop financing war. Such monies can be used to create a bright future for the peoples of the world. Many girls today are not going to school. Potentially, they are the unemployed of tomorrow. Economic development depends on level of education.

Our message to the world: guarantee the opportunity for all girls and women to receive an education so as to enable them to be integrated into society. They will then all become full-fledged citizens of their county, and that will make them independent.
