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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”

Statement submitted by Sudanese Women General Union, 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

Statement submitted by the Sudanese Women General Union to the sixtieth session of the Commission on the Status of Women

The Sudanese Women General Union is a non-governmental volunteer organization that works to empower women economically, socially and politically through the activities and projects which it implements through its branches. The Union has 27,000 branches spread throughout Sudan. It seeks to establish justice and equality in society to guarantee the human rights of women and children. It does so by formulating strategies, policies, plans and programs to strengthen and promote the role of women. The Union obtained consultative status in the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations in 2007.

The Union has undertaken a number of activities, including: establishing a database on the status of men and women; reviewing national, regional and international commitments concerning the empowerment of women; establishing networks of non-governmental organizations; and establishing capacity building programs to strengthen and protect the constitutional rights of women, improve the welfare of women and children, lower the mortality rates of women and children and increase awareness among women of sexually transmitted infectious diseases and methods for protecting against them. The Union has also participated in peace building, spreading a culture of peace and reducing alphabetic and electronic illiteracy.

In the social sphere, the Union has established 101 development centres throughout Sudan. It has worked to provide social, health, educational and family counselling services by raising the awareness of families regarding gender fairness and equality, inheritance rights and the damage to health of female genital mutilation and early marriage. The Union has also established children's cultural centres in the development centres and has worked to provide them with means for children's educational and sports activities.

The Union is an active member in the National Committee for the Homeless. It has conducted awareness raising and protection campaigns for the homeless and has worked to reunite homeless persons with their families. It is active in providing healthcare for the elderly, improving their living environment and accommodations, and incentivizing and raising the awareness of workers who serve the elderly to enhance care for the elderly. The Union supports many centres for the care of persons with disabilities. It participates in the provision of health and educational services and various subventions. The greatest challenge facing these efforts is to provide ongoing quality service over a wide area.

The Union has undertaken numerous initiatives to empower women economically, especially in rural areas, including the Woman's Project Portfolio, micro financing, benevolent loans, and the Rural Women's Innovation Prize. The Union has participated in all these projects to alleviate poverty among women and raise their living standards.

The Union initiated the establishment of the Women's Amal Foundation for Micro Financing to support all these initiatives and unify efforts. The Union established this foundation in partnership with the Central Bank of Sudan and the Ministry of Welfare and Social Security. It implemented a plan to establish branches

in nine states benefiting, as of 2015, 4,749 female beneficiaries, whose rate of non-performance has been only 1.1 per cent. These efforts face many obstacles in the training of women to increase the success rate of projects. In addition, the foundation has not received any support from the international community.

The gains of Sudanese women have strengthened the ongoing efforts to empower women politically and increase their presence in decision-making positions. The Union helped organize a number of workshops for female leaders in political organizations and parties to discuss the Constitution, Elections Law and national dialogue. These efforts resulted in a 30 per cent increase in the percentage of women participating in the legislative councils and executive agencies at the national and state level. This percentage may be further increased by enhancing societal awareness of elections and supporting female candidates in the electoral districts. This requires greater efforts as well as technical and material support. The Union has also helped enable Sudanese women to exercise their constitutional rights by educating and training women about the general elections that were held in April 2015.

The Union has implemented many health projects, the most salient being the Midwife for Every Village initiative. This project was unable to cover all needy areas due to a lack of material resources. The Union also provided training to health secretaries in the states in motherhood and child measures, assuring the success of breast-feeding (which reduces child mortality by 13 percent), and the use of trained midwives to meet the needs of pregnant and nursing women to support health through birth based on the Union's Midwife for Every Village initiative. Regarding the environment, the Union implemented a women's project to clean the city as well as environmental sanitation and handwashing campaigns in the framework of a health and wellness campaign.

All of these efforts continue to fall short of meeting the needs. The greatest threat to the development of Sudanese women and the primary obstacle to the empowerment of women are the unilateral coercive measures under which Sudan has fallen because of the economic sanctions imposed on it. Also, the external debts encumbering the state adversely affect the progress and advancement of women and continue to impede the advancement of rural and urban Sudanese women.

The Union recommends:

- Eliminating the economic sanctions on Sudan. This would be a positive development that can facilitate the development of women.
- Appealing to the Commission to act to forgive Sudan's debts under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative to enable Sudan to provide the necessary budgets to empower and develop the capacities of women.
- The provision of technical and material support for economic, social, health and political projects to Sudanese women by the United Nations, which plays an effective role in the advancement of women.
- Establishing a regional micro financing organization to reduce women's poverty in Africa. The Women General Union initiated the establishment of a General Union of Organizations of African Women in 2014 to increase the solidarity of African women represented in these organizations and thereby strengthen sustainable development and the empowerment of women at all levels.