



## Economic and Social Council

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### Commission on the Status of Women

#### Sixtieth session

14-24 March 2016

**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 Imamia Medics International, 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.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

Imamia Medics International welcomes the opportunity provided by the sixtieth session of the Commission on the Status of Women to address women's empowerment and its links to sustainable development. The synergies between sustainable development across social, economic and environmental pillars on one hand, and gender equality and women's empowerment on the other, have been increasingly accepted in recent years. In "Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" (2030 Agenda), Member States recognize gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls as a crucial contributor to progress across all the sustainable development goals and targets. The health of women and girls has also assumed global significance not only as an issue of concern, but also as a prerequisite for gender equality, sustainable development, peace and security.

In the Millennium Development Goals era, strides were made in areas such as increasing access to contraception and essential interventions, reducing maternal and child mortality and malnutrition and combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis. However, the overall health of women and girls continues to be a matter of grave concern with limited or no access to essential, good-quality health services and education. The annual death toll for women and girls is still high: 289,000 maternal deaths with 99 per cent of them in developing countries. An additional 15 to 20 million women suffer debilitating consequences of pregnancy. Eighteen million deaths — i.e. two in every three deaths — among women are caused by non-communicable diseases — largely heart disease, stroke, cancer, diabetes and chronic respiratory diseases; 5.9 million deaths in children under the age of five — including 2.7 million newborn deaths — and 1.3 million adolescent deaths. Most of these deaths could have been prevented.

At this important juncture, as the 2030 Agenda with its set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals officially comes into effect this year, Member States and the international community must now act to implement national and local health programs to tackle these preventable deaths and ensure meaningful access to good-quality health services and health education for women and girls. Improved health outcomes help women and girls to strengthen their own agency and empowerment. Healthy women are more able to actively participate in society and markets and take collective action to advance their own interests. They are likely to have increased bargaining power and control over resources within the household.

Simultaneously, increased gender equality and women's empowerment can lead to improvements in health and the quality of life for women and their families. For instance, when women have greater voice and participation in public administration, public resources are more likely to be allocated towards investments in human development priorities, including health and nutrition. Women with greater agency are more likely to access health services and have control over health resources. Their children are more likely to survive through adolescence, and receive health care when they need it. Consequently, an integrated approach to women and girls' health demands gender equality and women's empowerment at all levels and in all sectors by Member States and the international community.

Currently, the risks to health, (and consequently sustainable development, peace and security,) due to humanitarian emergencies are at all time highs, with

women and girls also particularly vulnerable in these settings. At least 1 in 5 female refugees and internally displaced persons in countries affected by conflict are victims of sexual and gender-based violence. Women and children are 14 times more likely to die in a disaster than men. The maternal mortality in conflict states and humanitarian settings is more than double the global average at 60 per cent.

Alarming, the health sector, critical in humanitarian response and sustainable development, is itself increasingly under attack — especially in conflict zones where the greatest humanitarian and health needs are faced. The last few years have brought the very right to health and its sanctity under serious threat with targeted violence and indiscriminate attacks on health workers, patients, and health facilities.

To ensure sustainable development, Member States must uphold and reinforce the universal principle of medical neutrality and protect health workers, patients and health facilities from these attacks that deny the right to health. Protecting health in conflict and humanitarian settings also requires interventions that go beyond the humanitarian sector. Member States and their political, military and civic leaders have the responsibility for protecting health in these settings and they must be held accountable for any failures.

Member States and the international community must also mainstream gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls throughout humanitarian action to improve protections for women and girls given their increased vulnerability. In humanitarian settings, specialized gender based violence services and programs must be available from the onset of an emergency. Actions must be implemented from the earliest stages of humanitarian responses to reduce gender based violence risk across all levels and sectors of humanitarian response.

It is crucial that the sixtieth session of the Commission on the Status of Women should conclude with a strong outcome that reaffirms the commitment of Member States to further addressing these challenges to health, gender equality and women's empowerment and taking concrete action to ensure that these commitments are upheld as the journey towards 2030 begins.

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