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**Statement of the Syrian Women forum for Peace**

**Pre-working session for CEDAW Fifty Eight pre-session**

**Geneva, 21 October 2013**

Ladies and Gentlemen

It gives us a great pleasure to be with you today in the pre-session working group, hoping to convey the voice of the Syrian women who are living under a very inhuman and harsh civil war.

The "Syrian Women Forum for Peace" is a Syrian non-governmental organization, based in Damascus with a wide network of women and activists across the country. The Forum aims at empowering women to play an effective and constructive role in peace building process and empowering women to be a key player and form a critical mass in the political life. The Syrian Women Forum for Peace focuses on four thematic areas: Communication, Networking, Training, and Empowerment of local communities.

Ladies and Gentleman

It is widely known that any armed conflicts exacerbates existing gender inequalities, placing women at a heightened risk of various forms of sexual and gender-based violence perpetrated by various actors in the armed conflict.

Syrian women have never enjoyed equality with men. The initial report of the Government of Syria of 2005 clearly indicated discrimination against women in all aspects of public and private life. Situation has not improved, on the contrary, and due to armed conflict, Syrian women were subject to all kind of sexual and gender based violence.

Since the beginning of the Syria crisis in March 2011, no fewer than 1.8 million refugees have fled from Syria, mainly to Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey and Egypt. Fear of sexual violence is commonly cited by refugees as one of the reasons for leaving.

Within Syria, more than 4.25 million people have been internally displaced, and 6.8 million people are in need of humanitarian aid. All civilians in conflict-affected areas are at great risk of violence, but women and girls are at particular risk of sexual violence due to forced displacement, family separation, lack of basic structural and social protections, and limited availability and safe access to services. Risk of sexual violence increases with the proliferation of small arms, and the growing number of armed groups often operating under unclear command structure.

Women living in refugee or displaced camps are at risk to trafficking and slavery-like practices, often with little or no access to basic and essential services such as clean water, food or access to health care.

It goes without saying that conflict related sexual and gender-based violence does not occur in a vacuum, it is always accompanied by the loss of livelihoods and destruction of family and community structures. Hence, Syrian women experienced widespread violations of socio-economic rights, education rights and reproductive rights.

More than that, according to Nott, a British surgeon who is on a volunteer stint in the war-torn countries, and who has worked for two decades in war zones, has reported seeing some unusual patterns emerge among the victims coming into his hospital who are Pregnant women—the snipers are playing a game by targeting pregnant women to kill the babies while they are in there mother's womb.

Sexual violence was not restricted to women only. Cases of child marriage according to a UNICEF report, rose six percent.

Having described the current situation in Syria, one would ask how the situation of women is best assessed in Syria, and would CEDAW periodic and shadow reports be enough? Of course, many issues need attention under CEDAW but special measures should be adopted for the current situation in Syria.

The Syrian Women Forum for Peace would strongly advocate for advising the United Nations to ask all parties involved in submitting periodic and shadow reports on CEDAW to allocate special chapter on 1325 and 1820 implementation.

In the time of conflict, we should focus on the related UN treaties and resolution. i.e. 1325 and 1820 in the case of conflict and use in addition to the avenge UN treaties. The Syrian Women Forum for Peace gives utmost attention along with its main partner Karama, to conduct the research and provide women with needed training. These two resolutions would definitely help on recognizing the disproportionate impact of conflict on women and children and call for women's full and equal participation in conflict prevention, conflict resolution, peace building and decision-making on peace and security at all levels

 Ladies and Gentlemen

The Syrian women Forum for Peace welcome the new resolution of the UN Security Council that was adopted two days ago, which sets in place stronger measures to enable women to participate in conflict resolution and recovery, and we advocate for putting these measures in place for Syria and hold all the Syrian parties responsible for implementing these resolution in line with implementing CEDAW.

 Distinguished committee members

As the international negotiation efforts try to pave the way for Geneva II, the Syrian Women Forum for Peace (SWFP) strongly believes that without the women's full support and participation, no peace agreement can succeed or implemented especially on the level of the local communities. To that end we are advocating for a logical frame work to assess the gender sensitivity of peace building process in Syria, through developing the right indicators for the seven point road map which was launched by the Forum.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Peace and women is very much linked. Development and women are also very much linked and we hope that issues of women and security would be very much reflected in post 2015 agenda. We believe that reviewing CEDAW in Syria should be seized for further advocacy for women involvement in rebuilding the country. Thanks.