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**High-level segment: annual ministerial review: implementing
the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard
to gender equality and empowerment of women**

Statement submitted by International Federation of Family Associations of Missing Persons from Armed Conflicts, 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 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/2010/100.



Statement

War is the ultimate crisis. All families face hardships post-conflict, but families with members missing as a result of war, specifically the male breadwinner, suffer further adversities.

During war, women are victims of direct and indirect violence. Women are beaten and raped, and made to watch their children being butchered in front of them, while there are continual threats to butcher remaining family members if the women are not cooperative.

Whether the violence is direct or indirect, the effect is the same. These women suffer low self-esteem with feelings of abandonment, helplessness and shame about what happened to them. When they have husbands missing as a result of war, their grief is compounded. These vulnerable women are now head of the household. In essence, they are taken out of their comfort zone, namely their traditional family role, and placed in a new role for which they have no experience, training or community support.

Since their spouse is not dead but “missing”, there is no death certificate, without which women cannot remarry and have a male head of household. They cannot gain access to bank accounts to pay for family necessities, cannot inherit land, and often leave the only home they have known with their children. Without training, women cannot work to provide on going support for their families.

Our organization, the International Federation of Family Associations of Missing Persons from Armed Conflicts, forms family associations to implement family-empowerment programmes that teach women self-reliance, focusing on the family’s strength. We have successfully implemented innovative projects to address new concepts of the rights and responsibilities of the family unit as a whole and the importance of empowering women to take on new roles when the family dynamics change. Families surviving war do not have the same dynamics as they had before the war, becoming the silent victims of armed conflicts.

Our programmes allow women to express their feelings of helplessness in a supportive network, and to heal their pain and suffering while building their confidence and recognition of the skills needed to handle the new responsibilities thrust upon them. They shed the persona of the victim needing protection and are empowered to become active, self-confident partners in the family and society as a whole.

As stated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the family group unit is the foundation upon which society is structured. A family cannot be restored to stability piecemeal. The entire family must be treated as a whole for successful family growth. Our programmes are centred on the “family unit” as the fundamental core of the recovery process. We believe that only by healing families as a group unit, can the Millennium Development Goals be met.

The Federation respectfully requests that new initiatives and action proposals for the Economic and Social Council recognize the fundamental rights and importance of the family group unit maintained, and develop innovative gender-responsive policies for women who are forced to assume new family roles as a result of family members missing in armed conflicts.