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INTERACTIVE EXPERT PANEL

**Implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in
regard to gender equality and empowerment of women**

Gender equality, empowerment of women and post-conflict development *

The post cold war era saw the emergence of vast civil conflicts that impacted communities to varying degrees. Women and girls make up the majority of victims in these internal conflicts. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, women were abducted, raped and forcibly impregnated. In Rwanda, women were forcibly gang raped and intentionally infected with HIV/AIDS. Liberian and Sierra Leonean women suffered rape and mutilation. The story is ongoing in northern Uganda, Democratic Republic of the Congo and in many unnamed and internationally unrecognized conflict areas.

Women have now become the greatest victims of war and the biggest actors for peace. The humiliation and pain experienced during conflict has never been able to deter women's peacebuilding initiatives and efforts. The desire and drive has always been to use their own pain and suffering to transform and build more secure communities.

Despite the roles women play in urging for the end to conflict and the rebuilding of their communities, they continue to remain conspicuously absent from formal peace and reconstruction processes. However, women have continued to prove that given the chance they can change the face of conflict and rebuild their communities. Their perspectives and experiences are critical to stability, the strengthening of judicial systems and national recovery.

Globally, conversations about women's roles in the resolution and prevention of conflicts have increased. Women worldwide welcomed and celebrated the passage of the landmark Security Council resolution 1325 on women, peace and security in October of 2000. The general feeling and assumption was that finally women would have their say in the debate on issues of peace and security. Today, many more landmark resolutions aimed at protecting women from war related violence have also been passed. Despite these instruments, the political will to support women's efforts in peacebuilding has continued to be a challenge.

Women's activities aimed at building peace and their communities can be categorized into three distinct phases of the conflict spectrum - pre-conflict, during and post-conflict. In the pre-conflict stage, women are the first group of people to know that a conflict is eminent. In Liberia, women at the Jah Tondo displaced camp, spoke some years ago about activities and strange movement in their communities that made them aware that the fighting was approaching their communities. One sign they described was the

Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and Elisabeth Rehn have noted that, “the impact of conflict on women’s lives is a reflection of the interaction during peacetime.”¹ This statement is very true. Cultural practices and entrenched systems of patriarchy serve as blockades to the advancement of women in areas of governance, leadership and economic empowerment.

If gender equality goals and commitment are to be realized, it is imperative that constitutional review and reform with the aim of addressing areas of discrimination takes place.

Judicial reform seeking to address gender-based violence must be prioritized. For example, as a means of adequately addressing the increase in cases of rape and sexual

