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**STATEMENT
TO
THE SECURITY COUNCIL**

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**WOMEN
AND
PEACE AND SECURITY**

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**STATEMENT TO THE SECURITY COUNCIL ON WOMEN AND PEACE AND SECURITY:
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Mr President,

Thank you for taking this important initiative. In the ongoing debate in our Organisation on finding more meaningful ways and means to address conflicts in the new Millennium, it is most appropriate that we meet to discuss the relation between Women and Peace and Security.

In our commitment to deal with conflicts in a comprehensive manner, including addressing the root causes of conflicts, we must acknowledge that the widespread exclusion of women from political and economic decision-making is a significant obstacle to the realisation of sustainable global peace and security.

In other words, and as was so concisely summed up in the final declaration of the All-Party Burundi Women's Peace Conference held in Arusha, from 17-20 July 2000:

"women's rights are human rights."

The significance of women's active contributions to South Africa's liberation and their relevance to today's debate, goes far beyond South Africa, our sub-region, and even our Continent.

Indeed, for South Africa and the rest of us in the SADC, this topic bears special relevance, bearing in mind the critical and essential roles played by women in our struggles for liberation from colonisation, apartheid, conflict and repression.

These women, and many others elsewhere in the world, have demonstrated that women have indispensable social, political and economic roles to play in bringing about sustainable peace and security.

It was for this reason on 9 August this year, at our National Women's Day celebrations, that the South African President dedicated a monument in tribute to the role played by women in shaping a democratic, non-racist, and non-sexist South Africa.

In that ceremony, President Mbeki unveiled the portraits of courageous and dedicated women leaders such as Lilian Ngoyi, Helen Joseph, Raheema Moosa and Sophie de Bruyn. These leaders were at the forefront of the struggle for a just society in South Africa. We pay special tribute to them for their role in leading the mass-defiance campaigns against apartheid legislation, and to the many unsung heroines of that struggle, which culminated in 1956 with a march by tens of thousands of women to Pretoria.

Thanks to the positive examples and contributions of pioneering leaders such as these, South Africa is today committed to achieving and sustaining equal participation and representation of women in

our Parliament and Government - which currently stands at about 30 percent.

Mr President,

It is true that in today's conflicts it is civilians, and women and children in particular, who bear the brunt of gross abuses of human rights. There is another dimension however, and we need to move beyond the limited approach of portraying women solely as victims in conflicts.

For all societies in this world, and more so for societies in conflict, women play a key role in sustaining both the family and the wider community. In many developing countries, our communities are fracturing under the combined weight of internecine conflicts, poverty, communicable diseases such as HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria, mass urbanisation, economic restructuring and other effects of globalisation. More often than not, it is working women who must quite literally put bread on the table, and hold families together.

Given the central role that women play in the social, political and economic development of our societies, it is morally right and logical that the full realisation of equal political and economic rights for women must be treated as an essential component of our collective approach to preventing and resolving conflicts.

In Africa, where there are already signs that there is a political and economic revival, it is clear that women have, must, and will continue to play a full role in the renaissance of our Continent.

Anything less, therefore, would be short-sighted, and despite our best intentions, our collective commitment to address the root causes of conflicts will come to naught unless women are afforded an equal role.

In her address to the General Assembly on 13 September, South Africa's Foreign Minister, Dr Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, said that:

"The founders of the UN based their declaration on asserting human dignity, human rights and equality of woman and man and promotion of better social standards...

The equality of women and men still remains a subject of great concern. All we need to do is look around this hall to realize how far we are from realizing the vision of the founders of the UN. The feminization of poverty is of great concern. The marginalization of women in the sovereign states and in the multilateral fora means that our countries and organizations, including the UN, are functioning at half capacity and are deprived of the unique qualities, energies and creativity that women would bring."

Mr President,

We have all already agreed that the root causes of conflict are poverty, disease, lack of education, lack of human and political rights, and a lack of economic opportunity and justice.

We must now equally agree that we cannot adequately address these problems if we exclude over half of humanity from enjoying these rights. Neither can we do so if we continue to prevent womankind from participating in the process of finding and implementing solutions.

As a minimum, we must:

- pay special attention to the impact of armed conflicts on the rights of women and girls;
- promote and implement specific strategies to protect and assist women and girls in armed conflicts;
- promote strategies that maximise women's participation in domestic, regional and international conflict prevention, management and resolution initiatives, and the UN must set an example by making sure women are represented adequately at all decision-making levels; and
- promote and strengthen women's participation in comprehensive post-conflict peace-building initiatives including in such areas as electoral, constitutional, legal and judicial reforms.

Mr President,

In conclusion let me say that it is my delegation's hope that today's debate in the Council will strengthen existing efforts in the United Nations system, including in the General Assembly and in the relevant United Nations Agencies, to improve the status of women globally.

My delegation would like to express its profound thanks to the Presidency of the Council for this month for placing the issue of women and peace and security on the agenda. We also welcome the transparent and participatory approach adopted by the Presidency in arranging both today's debate. The imaginative use of the "Arria formula" to hold yesterday's consultations between Council members and non-state actors from international women's rights organisations, and other human rights organisations, is further welcome as they have much to offer our deliberations and decisions.

This is further evidence of the positive trend toward the adoption of more open working methods and procedures in the Council.

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