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Statement

by

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**United Nations Security Council
Arria Formula on Women, Peace and Security:
*“Closing the Protection Gap for Widows in Conflict and Post-Conflict
Settings”***

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Check against delivery

Thank you Chair:

We welcome remarks by the distinguished representatives of the African Union, UN Women, the European Union, and the representative of Niger. We also thank our distinguished briefers for their thoughtful contributions. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines is pleased to join as co-hosts of this meeting, and we thank Niger for their leadership in organising this event.

Excellencies,

The trauma and economic marginalisation experienced by mothers, women who self-define as widows and children of men killed or missing, are among the most egregious consequences of protracted conflict. We wish to contextualise our remarks on the situation for widows and other women who have lost their partners to armed conflict by first calling attention to historically unequal relations of gender which produce socio-economic restrictions on women. Globally, a tendency by states to define women in relation to their marital and motherhood status is the basis upon which socio-economic opportunities are either denied or made available to women. It is within this context that we must address the gendered harms confronting women who have lost their partners to armed conflict, most of whom are left behind to manage households, care for children and the elderly, and meet the educational needs of their children, in some of the most economically depressed circumstances.

Against this backdrop, and in interest of time, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines wishes to contribute the following two points to today's discussion:

First, we endorse the perspective that both the normative and operational elements of the Women, Peace and Security architecture must expand to address the specific challenges experienced by women who self-identify as widows and women heads of households more generally. Even as we strive to be concise in the articulation of the agenda, the specific needs of various groups of women in conflict and post-conflict settings, including widows and female heads of households, must be addressed. Governments, with the support of regional organisations and the international community, must commit to eliminating the structural, systemic and ideological arrangements, including discriminatory laws, which feed stigma, socio-economic marginalisation and sexual and gender-based violence experienced by both widows, and women heads of households, more generally.

In this regard, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines is honoured to be a member of the Group of Friends of the Women of the Sahel. We pay tribute to the leadership of women civil society and women community activists, responsible for shining a light on the plight of widows in the region, and who are at the forefront of defining and enacting solutions. The testimonies and analysis shared by Ms. Rawi speak volumes to the material reality of widows, calling on us to act with great urgency and to do so constructively.

We also wish to call attention the advocacy and actions undertaken by the Global Fund for Widows, through initiatives like the Widows' Savings and Loan Association (WISALA). We appreciate the concrete proposals shared by both Ms. Rawi and Ms. Ibrahim-Leathers.

This brings me to our second and final point. Women headed households are among the most economically precarious globally; a situation made worse in conflict and post-conflict settings. We've heard that more 50% of the female population in these settings identify as or identified as widows. There is indeed urgent need for predictable and adequate resourcing of

the WPS agenda, WPS national action plans, and to fund the significant and specific needs of widows and women household heads as part of these national plans. We recommend the collection of cross-national baseline data on the situation of widows and women household heads in these settings, to inform a more comprehensive, predictable multi-level funding model, in which states, regional organisations, the UN, IFIs and international organisations collectively commit and participate.

To conclude, we wish to add that any action undertaken to address the situation for widows and other women household heads in conflict and post-conflict settings, must be done in close dialogue with those women affected. In this regard, today's meeting is especially significant.

I thank you.