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**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and
to the special session of the General Assembly entitled
“Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for
the twenty-first century”**

Statement submitted by Ellen Johnson Sirleaf Market Women’s Fund, 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 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.



Statement

The recent outbreak of Ebola virus disease highlighted some unique challenges that affect the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women, as well as some unique opportunities to achieve those goals in the forthcoming post-2015 development agenda.

Since 2007, the Ellen Johnson Sirleaf Market Women's Fund has worked to renovate existing market infrastructure and build new markets; provide clean water, sanitary facilities, electricity and safe storage for marketeers; provide adult literacy and entrepreneurial training programmes for market women; help to establish savings and loan associations; provide day-care centres and playgrounds inside the markets for the children of market women; and help to establish health facilities in the markets. We express gratitude to the Fund for Gender Equality and its predecessor, the United Nations Development Fund for Women, for supporting our activities.

The current approach of addressing development issues from singularly focused perspectives rather than integrated holistic perspectives has been challenged by the recent Ebola epidemic, in particular at its epicentre in the three West African nations of Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone. Our work tells us that the lives of women (and men) are not linear. They are interwoven, as evidenced by the impact of the Ebola outbreak. It is not just a health issue. It is an illiteracy issue. It is an economic sustainability issue. It is a food security issue. One issue leads to and has an impact on the other. How do we address this web of interconnected concerns at once?

There needs to be some inclusion in the next platform for action of support for women in circumstances such as an outbreak of Ebola, where support not only addresses the actual emergency, but allows for a broader interpretation of its systemic impact on women at the lowest levels of society as it progresses. Currently, our human rights and development frameworks recognize the interconnected web of concerns — with gender being just one of them — in situations such as conflicts or natural disasters (e.g. the earthquake in Haiti or the tsunami in Japan), but we do not currently view health disasters such as the Ebola outbreak in the same light. Perhaps the most comparable global health crisis has been HIV/AIDS, but, because of the slow-moving nature of that disease, the global response had more time to evolve and refine itself. With a fast-acting disease such as Ebola, the ability to mobilize quickly and deftly is paramount.

Social protection mechanisms need to be in place in the midst of a crisis of this nature. Working with market women who form the nerve centre of social life in countries such as those in West Africa where Ebola broke out is one way to effect change quickly.

The Fund exists to spearhead the advocacy movement of market women throughout Africa and the world. Our efforts reflect the fact that there is no way to do this without being holistic and integrative of multiple issues and needs at once. We offer this perspective to the ongoing dialogue about the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the creation of the post-2015 development agenda.