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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 Tchad agir pour l’environnement, 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.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Statement by Tchad agir pour l'environnement (TCHAPE) delivered to the Commission on the Status of Women at its fifty-ninth session, held in New York: The situation of women in Chad

Madam Chairperson,

In accordance with the commitments undertaken at the Fourth World Conference on Women held in China in September 1995, a large number of measures have been taken to support Chadian women. They include, in particular, measures to combat poverty, ensure schooling for young girls, provide health care for mothers and children, empower women and ensure their access to resources and recognize the vital role of women in society.

The status of Chadian women has undeniably improved in recent decades, notably in the area of education and professional activity. Chadian women have now acquired a status they did not enjoy a few years ago, despite certain forms of discrimination that persist owing to the weight of sociocultural tradition, the erroneous interpretation of religious teachings and resistance on the part of men. The more educated and skilled a woman is, the better chance she has of accessing leadership positions and exercising influence.

However, inequality between men and women persists and remains a major obstacle to national development. Despite the fact that the country has undergone a process of democratization, and despite advocacy and policies to promote Chadian women in the areas of literacy, schooling, health, employment, administration, politics and development, the gulf between men and women remains significant in Chad.

It is true that the recurring civil wars suffered by Chad since it gained independence on 11 August 1960 have broken down the socioeconomic, political and cultural fabric of the country and have helped to confine Chadian women to their traditional role as mothers and wives, rather than allowing them to act also as drivers of development who are responsible both for their families and the future of their country. Yet women constitute more than 50 per cent of the Chadian population.

We encourage the Government of Chad to pursue its various commendable efforts and its mobilization to promote women's welfare. Such action also requires ongoing international cooperation and assistance. The political will exists, as is demonstrated by one of the forceful statements made by the Chadian Head of State upon his inauguration in relation to women, whom he described as a lever for the socioeconomic development of our society. Such statements are at risk of becoming empty slogans if they are not followed by concrete actions.

That is why we call on the public authorities to pursue their efforts to fully engage women in decision-making and to enforce requirements relating to the representation of Chadian women in political and administrative bodies. It is also important that the draft Code on the Person and the Family be adopted in order to give Chadian women their proper place in national development.

As they become increasingly aware of their situation, Chadian women are trying to step out of the traditional framework that has been mapped out for them and to enjoy the important role they play in economic productivity and social reproduction so that they can improve their current situation, each according to her own abilities, qualities and starting point.

We condemn the unacceptable conduct of some midwives who, rather than respecting professional conduct with respect to the care and treatment of patients and compassion towards them, unfortunately engage in the ill treatment of pregnant women. Such practices take the form of physical and psychological violence (such as psychological harassment, abuse and the deprivation of rights).

We strongly condemn such practices, which damage the reputation of honest women who work in the same profession in accordance with ethical standards and principles. It is important that the perpetrators of such acts should be prosecuted before the competent courts in order to ensure justice for the victims.

This situation leads many women to choose to give birth at home despite the risks that home births present, rather than go to hospital, which is associated with ill treatment and painful childbirth. Therefore, births are not registered with a civil registrar. Many children are born in such conditions and consequently do not appear in the register of births. This has a negative impact on national statistics and consequently on national development.

However, it should be noted that Chad has made maternal and child health one of its priorities for development and continues to raise awareness in order to eradicate such practices.

We encourage the Government to pursue its efforts to raise general awareness so that women arriving at hospitals or maternity wards are not concerned in any way and are offered the necessary support up to the time of delivery. Maternal and reproductive health is recognized as one of the most important factors in a country's development and should therefore be at the centre of our concerns, thoughts and actions.
