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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 the African Centre for Industrial Research (CARI), 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

The aim of the Beijing Declaration was to improve the status of women in all facets of life:

- Gender equality;
- Women's access to public service;
- Women's self-respect in society.

Twenty years later, the question is whether progress has been achieved and, if not, what challenges remain to be addressed in order to attain the ideal.

With regard to gender equality, substantial progress has been achieved by the fact that, in many countries, earnings-monitoring institutions have been created; this is the case in the Democratic

Republic of the Congo, where a whole Ministry — named the Ministry of Gender, Family and Children — has been created.

This Ministry, headed by a woman, is behind the passing of laws to enshrine this reality.

This is the spirit in which women's access to public service has become easy, at the rate of 50%, 30%, 20%, etc., depending on the culture of each region.

The greatest remaining challenge relates to women's self-respect, undermined by the poverty syndrome which has only worsened over the past 20 years, especially in Africa, and which constitutes an obstacle to women's training and empowerment.

Besides poverty, there is also the phenomenon of the armed conflicts that have been running rife in the world, and more particularly in Africa.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo is a typical case, where sexual and gender-based violence beat the world record.

More than 200,000 cases of rape were reported by the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC) around 1996. This figure greatly underestimates the extent of the abuse and its physical, emotional and economic consequences, given the fear and other dissuasive factors deterring women and girls from denouncing crime.

According to the United Nations Mission in the Congo, the phenomenon of rape is widespread among the militias and the government security forces and is becoming more and more evident among male Congolese civilians, especially in the provinces emerging from conflicts.

There are several underlying causes and contributing factors behind the sexual violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, mainly relating to:

1. the deep-seated erosion of the status of women in conflict zones;
2. the weakness of State authority;
3. the collapse of grass-roots welfare mechanisms, etc.

To address these challenges, the main requirements are, on the one hand, to reinvent government and the means of fostering citizenship and, on the other, to develop science and technology with a view to industrializing the country.
