



## **Economic and Social Council**

Distr.: General  
11 November 2014

Original: English

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### **Commission on the Status of Women**

#### **Fifty-ninth session**

9-20 March 2015

**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 African Heritage Foundation Nigeria, 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**

### **Women's status and empowerment: current challenges in implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in Nigeria**

Gender equality and women's empowerment continue to be central themes in global treaties, covenants and declarations because they are now acknowledged as catalysts for people-centred development strategies, which focus on poverty reduction, improved standards of living and good government that gives men and women equal voices in decision-making and policy implementation.

Nigeria is a highly patriarchal society where men dominate all spheres of women's lives. Women are in a subordinate position (particularly at the community and household levels).

As in other male-dominated societies, the social relations and activities of Nigerian women and men are governed by patriarchal systems of socialization and cultural practices that favour the interests of men above those of women.

Consequently, a high percentage of women's employment is restricted to low-income activities, which are concentrated within the lower levels of the unregulated, informal economy, and which are not adequately represented in the national accounting system.

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action identified and adopted 12 critical areas of concern for the advancement of women. One such critical area of concern is poverty. The other areas of concern include education, health, violence against women, armed conflict and refugees, the economy, power-sharing and decision-making, insufficient mechanisms to promote the advancement of women, human rights of women, women and the media, women and the environment and the issue of the girl child.

At the World Summit for Social Development, held in Copenhagen in 1995, it was affirmed that gender equality is a prerequisite for the achievement of sustainable, productive employment, social integration and for the eradication of poverty. Women's empowerment is the first step towards poverty alleviation and poverty eradication. This is true because the disadvantaged position of women is attributed to poverty, unemployment and poor social integration. Where people live under unacceptable conditions of poverty, characterized by homelessness and joblessness, and particularly in rural areas with low-income earners, women bear a disproportionate amount of the burden of extreme poverty.

Today, women are striving to groom the girl child towards womanhood and promoting good governance and democracy based on equity, transparency and accountability. In Nigeria, for example, Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Minister of Finance of Nigeria, Dieziani Alison Madueke, Minister of Petroleum Resources, and Hajia Zainab, Minister of Women Affairs and Social Development, in different situations liaise with and help political parties and the Government to follow up on the commitments and resolutions made in respect of equal participation of women in politics and in promoting good governance.

The greatest vices that work against women in politics, such as the use of excessive money and thuggery, introduced by men into politics, affect the effective participation of women as partners in a just political and social order. It also seems difficult for women to close ranks and cooperate with men because of fear, petty jealousies, quarrels, gossip and a lack of organization that are women's own undoing.

Equally, parties are formed by men whose agenda with regard to women is not known until elections are won and lost.

Challenges include some of the traditional, social and economic handicaps to which women have been unduly subjected, which have led to their systematic deprivation of participation in the economic, social, cultural and political spheres, whether on a conscious or unconscious basis.

The inconsistencies of the Government, employers and relevant non-governmental organizations in developing programmes and procedures to eliminate sexual harassment and other forms of violence in all educational institutions pose challenges with regard to violence against women.

There is a lackadaisical attitude on the part of society, the Government and women themselves to ensure the integration of women as full and equal partners with men in all development efforts. Women's concerns are still given second priority almost everywhere, and women continue to face discrimination and marginalization.

With the persistent and increasing burden of poverty on women, Nigerian men consistently take their wives for granted, as they do not view the woman's job and household work as being so burdensome. Yet with the modern developments of mandatory education, urbanization and capitalism that are changing Nigerian society, women are now found in the leading occupations, challenging many aspects of patriarchy to ensure that the political arena expands sufficiently to accommodate them.

Where the alternative dispute resolution process is established, either within the family or in communities of inquiry, women do not enjoy participating in it with men as they are not given the opportunity to express their views as freely or as often as they wish. Women who have been affected by psychological and mental abuse from men, which is prevalent in most communities, are unable to take positive steps to ensure peace for the advancement of women or recognize their leading role in the peace movement.

A further challenge to the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action has been achieving women's economic rights, in particular when the economic activities engaged in by women take place within the home. There is an apparent lack of access to credit, which often results in the denial of economic opportunities for women. This occurs despite the fact that they generally are active in income-generating activities where their earnings are individually held and spent on what they perceive as their private needs such as social networking.

Women are not favoured in any land deals with men, and their difficulties in land matters are still overlooked, while deliberate obstacles are placed in their path to discourage them from directly aspiring to hold title of land.

In respect of access to health-care services, women still lack the freedom to decide for themselves about their health, in particular with regard to operations carried out in hospitals, since women are not allowed to be operated on without their husband's consent.

Extreme violence, conflicts, terrorism and kidnapping are hindering the achievement of development goals pursued by women, leading to the expansion of unspeakable poverty and giving men an advantage over women in contributing to the welfare of the family and to the development of society.

It could be said that power relations prevent women from participating equally in political life, essentially affecting the general process of the advancement of women.

Deep-rooted sociocultural barriers related to gender issues still persist in Nigeria, thus contributing to the slow pace of establishing a legal framework for the protection of women. Examples include:

- Minimal commitment and involvement of staff and local government officials in the fight against trafficking in women.
- Capacity gaps in the training of police officers to provide protective services for women victims.
- Slow judicial process, hindering quick access to justice of women victims of violence.
- Sexual exploitation, particularly of girls, has taken new dimensions with child prostitution on the rise in urban areas. It constitutes severe abuse of their fundamental human rights.
- Prevention projects for the eradication of sexual exploitation have not been fully stepped up in all states, especially where child trafficking is rife.
- Child trafficking is still undermining the survival and development rights of the child.
- Lack of programmes or projects through the media that would enhance the implementation of the rights of children and women.
- Lack of emphasis on awareness-raising to draw the attention of the public to the plight of disadvantaged women.
- Inconsistencies in offering grants to women in low-income groups to enable them to fulfil their economic responsibilities.

In conclusion, we wish to affirm that the empowerment and autonomy of women and the improvement of the social, economic and practical status of women are essential for the achievement of both transparent and accountable government administration and sustainable development in all areas of life. However, it is unfortunate to observe that Nigerian politics undervalues the role of women and their concerns and perspectives. This is why gender continues to be one of the basic sources of division and definition in Nigerian politics.