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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 Asabe Shehu Yar’Adua Foundation, 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

This statement is submitted by the Asabe Shehu Yar'Adua Foundation for the fifty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women. Women play an important role in nation-building. When you empower a woman, you empower a community. In developing countries, women are often saddled with the responsibility of providing for their families. Hence, they deserve to be recognized and treated with utmost importance to provide an enabling society and improve economic growth and stability.

In line with this objective, the General Assembly has launched various initiatives to recognize the value of women in society. For instance, it has decided that 15 May every year would be observed as the International Day of Families. The basic responsibility of raising a good family originally rests with women. That is why it is commonly said that, when you empower a man, you empower a single person, but when you empower a woman, you empower a community. In other words, empowering a woman so that she becomes resourceful and self-dependent means that she and her generation will be a resource to the economy.

The General Assembly has further buttressed the importance of women in society by designating 11 October as the International Day for the Recognition of the Girl Child. This International Day serves to advocate for the importance of girl children and to highlight the challenges facing them, such as gender inequality and the denial of their fundamental rights, and responses to those challenges.

Arising matters

At the present session, the Commission on the Status of Women will seek to review the responses to the decisions made at the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in September 1995. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action were developed approximately 20 years ago and many decisions were reached to better the status of women and increase their economic stability.

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action include the following goals:

- (a) Equality, development and peace for all women;
- (b) Acknowledging the voices of all women everywhere and taking note of their diversity;
- (c) Ensuring the full implementation of the human rights of women and girl children;
- (d) Women's empowerment;
- (e) Eradicating poverty, by involving women in social;
- (f) Eliminating all forms of discrimination against women and girl children and removing all obstacles to gender equality and the advancement and empowerment of women;
- (g) Promoting women's economic independence, including employment, and eradicating the persistent and increasing burden of poverty on women.

Efforts to meet these goals have produced a marked improvement in the welfare of women and girls all over the world.

Impediments to the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action were discussed and adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women. Full implementation of the provisions they contain is expected to have been achieved by now and the Asabe Shehu Yar'Adua Foundation hopes that the review in 2015 by the Commission on the Status of Women will bring about the full implementation of the Declaration to ensure an improvement in the lives of women and girl children across the world, especially in developing nations.

Studies reveal that some factors have slowed down implementation of the Platform for Action, for instance:

(a) *Cultural factors.* Despite incessant campaigns and awareness-raising efforts about the important role that women play in society, many cultures in developing countries still apply cultural norms that put restrictions on the role of women in society, something which has to be looked into at the present session;

(b) *Traditional factors.* Developing countries are full of traditions and antiquated laws that are an impediment to the social and cultural development of women. If these laws are not reviewed and amended, if not repealed, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action will not be fully implemented;

(c) *Religious factors.* The world has a deep recognition of religion, which is considered by many to be the first school of thought. Much credence is given to men of God and religions limit the role that women should play in society by placing restrictions on their participation in decision-making, both in private and in public. If nothing is done, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action might never be implemented. The doctrines of the world's major religions are highly regarded by many people worldwide. This is the most sensitive issue that should be discussed and considered at the present session;

(d) *Societal factors and influence.* Societies with high levels of illiteracy are often burdened by ignorance, which sets up barriers on the path to overall development for women and girl children;

(e) *Financial factors.* Another key factor in the slow progress in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action is the financial limitations faced by most families in developing countries.

Recommendations

The Asabe Shehu Yar'Adua Foundation makes the following recommendations to address the constraints and obstacles standing in the way of a full and progressive implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

(a) *Implementation of the Platform for Action.* In the Beijing Declaration, it is stated that the implementation of the Platform for Action requires commitment from Governments and the international community and that by making national and international commitments for action, including those made at the Fourth World Conference on Women, Governments and the international community recognize the need to take priority action for the empowerment and advancement of women. As regards the implementation of the Platform for Action, Governments should

collaborate with non-governmental and civil society organizations to raise proper awareness of the importance of women in society;

(b) *Education.* Education plays a vital role in the life of women and children. Most women suffer today because they lack education, and the Foundation recommends that Governments not only pass laws to ensure basic education but also engage with various stakeholders and cooperate with various entities to work on the provision of basic education to women;

(c) *Adequate security.* Governments should provide adequate security to women and children in order to encourage the education of women and girl children and to prevent a repetition of what happened to the school girls in Chibok, Nigeria;

(d) *Setting up of counselling centres.* The 2014 theme for the celebration of the International Day of the Girl Child was “Empowering adolescent girls: ending the cycle of violence”. This begs the long-standing question of how to end the cycle of violence when abused women do not get justice. It is our candid recommendation that Governments should partner with non-governmental and civil society organizations that aim to enable abused women and girls to seek redress and to have the perpetrators brought to justice.

In conclusion, the role of women in society cannot be overemphasized. If women are educated, we will have a society full of women with economic independence and employment, as well as a reduced poverty level.
