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entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and
peace for the twenty-first century”

Statement submitted by Awaz Centre for Development Services, and African Women’s Development & Communication Network (FEMNET), non-governmental organizations 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

On the occasion of the sixty-fourth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, women and girls with disabilities across the world are calling on all governments, United Nations agencies and multilateral institutions to ensure an inclusive, people-centred, and intersectional approach that guarantees the promotion and realization of the human rights of all women and girls with disabilities in all legislation and policies implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. We must ensure that no girl or woman with disabilities is left behind in the next review and implementation period.

There are an estimated one billion persons with disabilities around the world. Prevalence of disability is higher among marginalized groups and in rural areas, and up to 80 per cent of persons with disabilities live in developing countries. According to the World Health organization (WHO) and United Nations agency sources, persons over 60 years of age currently comprise over half of all persons with disabilities worldwide, with more than 250 million older women and men experiencing moderate to severe disability. Disability in older age groups particularly affects women, who live longer than men by an average of 5–8 years.

Looking ahead, the global trends in ageing populations and the higher prevalence of disability as people age is likely to lead to further increases in the population affected by disability.

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) and its optional protocol are instrumental in promoting the rights of persons with disabilities. Commitments have been made to women and girls with disabilities through General Recommendation 18 of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women and General Comment 3 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Too many women and girls, however, are subject to violation of their rights on a daily basis and face multiple barriers to inclusion and the realization of their rights. These barriers are particularly prevalent for women, who are more likely than men to become disabled throughout the course of their lives. Around one in five women have disabilities, and in low and middle-income countries, three quarters of persons with disabilities are women.

Some of the major obstacles experienced by women and girls with disabilities are negative attitudes, stigma, and discrimination from their families, communities and the wider society – based not only on their disability but also on their gender. Women and girls with disabilities are at risk of poverty, violence, and exploitation, along with inequality in the provision of and access to services and facilities.

Furthermore, in many countries women and girls with disabilities are uncounted and invisible in national statistics, demonstrating the need to promote the use of data disaggregated by disability and disability-inclusive data collection, through use of the Washington Group on Disability Statistics question sets.

The Global Call for Action Against Poverty and its partners have undertaken studies at the national, regional, and global level on the situation of women and girls with disabilities. Findings from interviews, focus groups, and country studies in urban and rural settings are that discrimination is severe, multiple, and intersectional in its manifestations and effects.

Chronic poverty, stigma, lack of opportunities, and denial of economic, social, cultural, civil, and political rights stemming from cultural, legal, and institutional barriers make women and girls with disabilities the victims of multiple and

intersectional discrimination. Women and girls with disabilities are deprived of their legal capacity, face the denial of their sexual and reproductive rights and health, and are subject to forced sterilization and coerced abortion. They are at risk of gender-based violence, stigmatization, marginalization from education and work opportunities, and sexual violence in both peace time and in periods of conflict. Few countries take account of the unique support needs and perspectives of women and girls with disabilities in terms of sanitation and hygiene (including menstrual hygiene), education, training, infrastructure, rehabilitation, assistive devices and technologies, and environmental factors, and how these issues hinder access to social protection, essential health services, and the participation of women and girls with disabilities in social and development activities, political decision-making, and in community life.

Furthermore, persons with disabilities are largely excluded from political, development, and peacebuilding processes, and even when they are included, the voices and needs of women and girls with disabilities are rarely heard and acknowledged, rendering them virtually invisible.

Because of the prevalence of disability – now and in the future – and the violation of the rights of women and girls with disabilities, it is an urgent and pressing topic for the Beijing+25 review. Each of the 12 areas of action of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action should have specific reference to and policy provision across the life course for women and girls with disabilities. However, many national reports fail to reference persons with disabilities, particularly women and girls with disabilities.

For gender equality and empowerment to become a reality for all women and girls, it is essential that the specific concerns and rights of women and girls with disabilities are placed centre stage for the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action commitments, as well as the Sustainable Development Goals. Achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals will not be possible unless and until women and girls with disabilities are included in policy actions across all goals and targets explicitly and meaningfully. The international community must do better to implement the rights of women and girls with disabilities as laid out in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the optional protocol.

Specific recommendations to national governments, United Nations agencies, and civil society are as follows:

- All measurement, indicators, targets, and reports for Beijing+25 and the Sustainable Development Goals should address issues of women and girls with disabilities, including its overlaps with other markers of identity, including age, location, and social identity, making use of the Washington Group on Disability Statistics question sets.
- Ensure that social protection floors reach persons with disabilities and that woman and girls with disabilities have full access to health, education, and sexual reproductive and social protection programmes.
- Women and girls with disabilities and their representative organizations to be fully involved in developing and implementing policies on gender equality and women's rights.
- Women and girls with disabilities and their representative organizations to be fully involved in programmes and research on issues of climate change and environmental sustainability.

- Humanitarian assistance and development programmes should specifically include and be responsive to the needs and rights of women and girls with disabilities.
- Women and girls with disabilities should participate in the planning and designing of national, regional, and global-level policies and programmes.
- Meaningful representation of women with disabilities in national, regional, and international political processes and within organizations of the United Nations and multilateral bodies.
- Governments to redouble their efforts to uphold the commitments set out in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, including the optional protocol and General Comment 3 on women and girls with disabilities.

Endorsed by African Women's Development & Communication Network (FEMNET)
