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

Statement submitted by Centre for Women Studies and Intervention, 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 Centre for Women Studies and Intervention (CWSI) is a non-governmental, non-sectarian, and nonprofit organization based in Abuja, Nigeria, dedicated to fostering the empowerment and dignity of women. CWSI's mission is to contribute to the construction of a just and equitable world by working directly with women and the girl-child on critical issues, including socio-economic empowerment, combatting gender-based violence, promoting women's participation in governance, and championing human rights. The organization serves as a holistic advocate, addressing the complex and multifaceted challenges facing women and girls, aiming to raise awareness and drive positive change in the pursuit of women's rights and gender equality.

Much of the work of CWSI in the past 22 years has been focused on the empowerment of women through the implementation of projects/programs that end violence against women and girls. Interventions on behalf of CWSI include addressing sexual violation, abuse, and the exploitation of women and girls. The violations that are committed against women have constituted physical and psychological harm and suppressed their human rights and freedoms.

To address poverty, CWSI implements grassroots tactics that work towards social development and humanitarian services in both urban and rural geographical locations including hard-to-reach communities. Considering that most of the vulnerable population in these remote locations are women and girls, CWSI works to promote economic justice and is committed to defending their rights. This is done through working to change behaviors, socio-cultural norms, structures, and systems that are oppressive and unjust.

Institutions gain resilience and financial support when they are made aware of and embrace a gender-focused approach. CWSI undertakes initiatives aimed at raising awareness of gender-based violence issues within the purview of state actors and government institutions. This proactive engagement serves as an advocacy platform for women and girls whose rights and freedoms are curtailed by entrenched cultural norms, patriarchal structures, societal silence, economic hardship, and dependence on others.

As part of CWSI's comprehensive approach to empowering women and girls and addressing poverty-related challenges, the organization is dedicated to eradicating child, early, and forced marriages, which are often driven by socioeconomic hardships in Cross River and Jigawa States. These marriages are prevalent in the region due to cultural practices that promote unions during a girl's youth or even infancy to supposedly secure her future. This harmful practice is driven by gender inequality, and lack of awareness, and is worsened by economic hardship. It's also compounded by the fact that it's not seen as a societal problem.

To combat the issue, CWSI is collaborating to implement the "Community Action to Ending Child Early and Forced Marriage (CEFM) and other Harmful Practices against Women and Girls project (CAECEFM)". The project addresses four local government areas in Cross River State and three in Jigawa State. It is dedicated to reducing the rates of Child Early and Forced Marriages and other forms of violence through raising awareness, advocacy campaigns, community-driven sensitization, socio-economic empowerment of vulnerable families, and integration of social life and skills for young girls that are out of school.

In addition to project execution, CWSI has been actively enhancing institutional capacity with a gender-oriented approach. This effort has involved the facilitation of town hall meetings, where thirty traditional leaders and prominent stakeholders have

convened to deliberate about Child Early Forced Marriages. Furthermore, the organization has conducted a one-day capacity-building session for various stakeholders, including traditional leaders, vigilante group leaders, law enforcement officers, and community leaders, to bolster their understanding and engagement on these critical matters.

Gender-based violence and Human Trafficking are pervasive issues in many Nigerian communities, with a notably higher prevalence in the Cross River North Senatorial District. These distressing phenomena find their roots in the shortcomings of both civil and traditional governance structures, perpetuating an environment where human rights violations persist unchecked. Human Trafficking gives rise to a multitude of harrowing injustices, subjecting its victims to forced labor, sexual exploitation, early pregnancies, and domestic abuse. Simultaneously, Gender-based violence remains a persistent human rights violation, concealed by a shroud of silence and impunity.

CWSI has demonstrated a steadfast commitment to instilling a gender-sensitive perspective in institutions, exemplified by their collaborative endeavor with Canada Development and Peace titled the “Communities Mobilizing to Stop Gender-Based Violence and Human Trafficking” project. This initiative operates in four Local Government Areas within Cross River State, aiming to address the pervasive issues of Gender-Based Violence and Human Trafficking. To effect meaningful change, a community-based “Action Group” was carefully trained to promote more inclusive social and cultural interactions, ultimately leading to the formulation of a customary law regulating behavior related to these challenges.

Moreover, the ongoing political turmoil in neighboring Cameroon has triggered a significant internal displacement, with approximately 87,000 Cameroonians seeking refuge in the Cross River State. This conflict stems from disputes surrounding judicial and educational systems within the regions, notably affecting women and girls. These displaced individuals, especially women and girls, confront heightened vulnerabilities, being exposed to physical and sexual violence within the confines of refugee and internally displaced persons (IDP) camps.

To combat sexual violence within the context of internally displaced persons, CWSI partnered with the African Women Development Fund (AWDF) on the “Inform Parents and Children Together on SGBV” project. This initiative serves a broader purpose by raising awareness about gender-based violence, encouraging host communities to establish policies conducive to peaceful coexistence among refugees and the realization of women’s aspirations, and fostering community awareness and support for the rights of women, girls, and other displaced individuals. In essence, this project seeks to influence institutions and promote the well-being of those affected by conflicts, championing the rights and representation of individuals impacted by sexual gender-based violence and displacement.

Conclusion

As an organization deeply committed to the empowerment and education of women and girls, CWSI aligns its mission with the broader global agenda encapsulated in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Specifically, pursuing gender equality, as enshrined in SDG5, is at the heart of its efforts. Through its multifaceted initiatives, CWSI not only addresses the complex challenges faced by women and girls but also actively contributes to the acceleration of progress towards SDG4, which focuses on quality education for all. By providing steadfast support, the organization endeavors to liberate women from the scourge of violence and to promote their economic independence, thereby advancing these critical SDG objectives and fostering a more inclusive and empowered society.

CWSI urges the Commission on the Status of Women, UN Women, and all pertinent United Nations bodies to advocate for the proactive implementation of policies by the Nigerian Government designed to safeguard the rights of women within the workplace, promote equilibrium between professional and family life, invest in the development of social care infrastructure, and facilitate broader access for women to productive assets encompassing property, financial resources, and digital assets.

CWSI calls upon the Commission on the Status of Women, UN Women, and all relevant United Nations entities to urge the Nigerian government to ensure full implementation of the provisions of the Trafficking in Persons Law Enforcement and Administrations Act, Violence Against Persons Act, and also expedite actions in the passage of the Gender and equal opportunities (GEOB) bill. Furthermore, the Nigerian government should work towards the adoption of customary laws about Gender-Based Violence and Human Trafficking. It is also crucial that these customary laws be publicly presented and popularized at a summit of 400 delegates in each of the three local government areas.

CWSI respectfully urges the Commission on the Status of Women, UN Women, and all pertinent United Nations bodies to collaboratively fortify local legal frameworks by codifying and reinforcing community laws. These measures are essential to secure the well-being and rights of children, women, girls, and individuals living with disabilities within the project communities.

Furthermore, CWSI advocates for a steadfast commitment from the Commission on the Status of Women, UN Women, and all relevant United Nations entities to prioritize the dissemination of human rights education. This educational imperative should encompass the rights of children, the various forms of child abuse, and comprehensive guidance on the appropriate channels for reporting instances of abuse. This comprehensive approach is essential in fostering a safer and more just society.

With the utmost deference, CWSI earnestly implores the Commission on the Status of Women to undertake all requisite measures to ensure women and girls' global protection and advancement. The strategic enhancement of institutions and financial mechanisms with a gender-oriented approach holds substantial promise in the pursuit of gender rights and equity on a global scale.
