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to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly  
entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and  
peace for the twenty-first century”**

### **Statement submitted by Equal Rights for Persons with Disabilities International, Inc, 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.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## **Statement**

### **Equal Rights for People with Disabilities in the Context of Historical Trauma in Women and Girls in Nigeria**

#### **Introduction**

Historical trauma is a profound concept that delves into the collective emotional and psychological scars left by significant historical events or prolonged adversity. It manifests itself across generations through a complex interplay of social, emotional, and behavioural challenges. This phenomenon is most commonly associated with historical events like genocide, slavery, forced displacement, and systemic oppression, which inflict enduring damage on the mental and emotional well-being of affected communities. In Nigeria, historical traumas have taken various forms, with a long list of deeply impactful occurrences. Women and the girl child are disproportionately affected by historical traumas. They bear the brunt of these conditions without systematic and structural approaches to provide lasting solutions.

#### **Historical Trauma in Nigeria**

##### **Civil War**

The scars of the Nigerian Civil War, which took place from 1967 to 1970, continue to affect the nation. The conflict not only resulted in significant loss of life but also left deep-seated divisions that persist to this day. The traumatic memories of war and loss of loved ones play a pivotal role in fuelling conflicts in today Nigeria. As recorded by many historians, they are subject of physical violence and sexual assault, displacement and loss of homes, discrimination and gender-based violence, exploitation and trafficking, amongst others.

##### **The Herders-Farmers conflict**

The Herders-Farmers conflicts are a contemporary manifestation of historical trauma, with clashes between herders and farmers over resources further exacerbating existing tensions. Many women have lost their families and livelihood owing to this conflict. In some other cases, they are raped, dehumanized, subjected to food insecurity. Of importance is the knowledge that most rural women in Nigeria engage in agriculture. When conflict disrupts this activity, women and girls often bear the brunt of food shortages and malnutrition, which can have long-term health consequences.

##### **Rape and Kidnap by Non-State Actors**

Rape and kidnapping by non-state actors such as Boko Haram, ISWAP, IPOB, and Niger Delta Militants have left indelible marks on Nigeria. These heinous acts result in physical and emotional trauma for the survivors and their communities. The ripple effects of these traumatic experiences are profound, leading to fear, distrust, and perpetuating cycles of violence.

##### **Environmental Degradation and Pollution**

Nigeria's rich oil-producing regions have been significantly affected by environmental degradation and pollution. The extraction of oil has left communities with depleted resources, widespread diseases, and loss of livelihood. Women and girls are particularly vulnerable to respiratory diseases, skin issues, and waterborne diseases due to their increased exposure to polluted environments. They are equally affected by loss of their livelihood. Environmental degradation, including soil

erosion, deforestation, and pollution, can lead to reduced agricultural productivity. Closely tied to this is water scarcity, food insecurity, exposure to toxins in areas with industrial pollution or mining activities, women and girls may be exposed to toxic substances, which can have severe health consequences, including birth defects, reproductive health issues, and developmental problems in children.

### **Human Trafficking and Irregular Migration**

Trafficking of innocent Nigerians, some of whom meet tragic ends in the Mediterranean Sea and Sahara Desert, is another source of historical trauma. The lack of support for survivors and their families compounds the trauma. Some of the women and girls, who have benefited from our organization's rehabilitation and reintegration programme often share harrowing stories of how they were subjected to sexual exploitation, forced labour, physical and psychological abuse, loss of freedom, health risks, family separation, trafficker's debt bondage, legal vulnerability, stigmatization and many more.

### **At-Risk Children Deprived of Education**

Nigeria faces a growing problem with at-risk children, many of whom are deprived of access to education. In some communities, female children are denied Western education, while Almajiris are left without formal education under the guise of culture and religion. Besides limited opportunities, there is also the reinforcement of inequality, a condition which leaves these children marginalized and denied access to social, economic and educational opportunities. Such children lose their identity all together. They miss out on the opportunities to learn about their cultural heritage and history. They are socially isolated and vulnerable to exploitation.

### **Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)**

FGM is a harmful cultural practice inflicting physical and psychological trauma. It can lead to historical trauma and development of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in the affected individuals. It is important to note that FGM is a violation of human rights and is internationally recognized as a harmful practice. The trauma of these experiences can impact their psychological well-being throughout their lives. This violation of bodily autonomy and the emotional distress caused by the procedure can lead to psychological trauma. Victims often have flashbacks and intrusive thoughts related to the traumatic procedure.

### **Forced Childhood Marriages**

Forced and early marriages subject young girls to traumatic situations, often leading to historical trauma. Child marriages can indeed be a significant cause of PTSD in the victims, particularly girls. Child marriages often involve young girls being forced or coerced into unions against their will. This experience can be highly traumatic, as it robs them of their agency and autonomy, leading to feelings of helplessness and fear.

Forced Marriages lead to early sexual activity as child brides may be subjected to sexual activity at an age when they are not physically, emotionally, or mentally prepared for it. In Northern Nigerian, many child brides often find themselves isolated from their families, friends, and support networks. Reproductive Health Complications is commonplace as early pregnancies and childbirth are common consequences of child marriages.

### **Stigmatization of Victims and Lack of Formal Support**

One significant concern is the underreporting and lack of formal support for historical trauma victims in Nigeria. These traumatic events often become normalized, without access to counseling, psychiatric evaluation, and proper mental health care for survivors. As a result, many individuals are left to cope with their trauma in silence, leading to generational reoccurrence of historical trauma, as women often unknowingly transfer their PTSD to their children.

### **Recommendation**

To address historical trauma and PTSD in Nigeria, several key steps should be taken:

- **Advocacy and Awareness:** Women and mothers should intensify advocacy efforts to raise awareness about historical trauma and PTSD in Nigeria. Engaging with local communities and national platforms is vital to bring these issues to the forefront.
- **Government Involvement:** The offices of the First Lady of Nigeria and the Executive Governors of the 36 states should play a critical role in this campaign. They must understand that unattended historical trauma and PTSD can lead to a cycle of generational victims. Public policies and programs should be developed to provide support and assistance.
- **Education:** In Northern Nigeria, where religious inclination is strong, there is a need to encourage the acceptance of Western education. Education can act as a panacea for many of the issues bedevilling the region. Collaboration with religious leaders is essential to bring about this change.
- **NGO Engagement:** NGOs that focus on equal rights and social justice should consider historical trauma and PTSD as significant causes to pursue. Increased and sustained awareness campaigns, along with providing support and resources, are key to addressing these issues.
- **Religious Organizations:** Religious organizations should recognize the reality of historical trauma and PTSD and offer support beyond spiritual guidance. Seeking professional advice and counselling can significantly benefit individuals struggling with these conditions.
- **International Involvement:** The international community should recognize that addressing historical trauma can have broader implications, including resolving insecurity in Nigeria. By tackling the root causes of these issues, Nigeria can become more stable and secure, reducing the need for continuous financial aid from Western nations and international donors to address insecurity.
- **Mental Health Services:** Increase access to mental health support and counselling services, especially in conflict-affected areas.
- **Legal Reforms:** Strengthen and enforce laws against child marriage, FGM, and SGBV.
- **Social Services:** Expand access to social services, including shelters and legal aid for survivors.
- **Data Collection:** Gather comprehensive data on the prevalence and impact of historical traumas and PTSD.

## Conclusion

Historical trauma in Nigeria are deeply entrenched issues with far-reaching consequences. Addressing these challenges requires a concerted effort from various stakeholders. By understanding the link between historical trauma and contemporary issues like insecurity, Nigeria can work towards a more stable and secure future, benefiting not only its citizens but also the international community. The road to recovery will be long and challenging, but it is essential for the healing and progress of the nation.

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