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

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**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and  
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 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-religious, and not for profit organization with its headquarters in Abuja, Nigeria. The organization is dedicated to ensuring that women can live with freedom and dignity. By empowering and upholding the rights of women and the girl-child, CWSI aims to construct a just and equitable world. In order to do so, CWSI directly works with women and the girl-child to promote awareness in areas such as economic empowerment, gender-based violence, and human rights.

Women in different regions of Nigeria face issues related to restriction from working night shifts, no protection from gender discrimination, and having no equal pay for equal work set into law. If women take maternity leave, they are not guaranteed their equivalent position when they return to work. In addition, some cultural practices tend to downgrade the abilities of women, leaving them with a much lower opportunity to get access to social services and education. In addition, while efforts to prosecute offenders related to violence against women has increased slightly in recent years, there remains a significant lack of legal action, in some cases due to fear of retaliation and corruption in the government.

Cultural practices influence society's point of view greatly. This, in turn, tends to be a hindrance to women and results in inequality to access education, healthcare services, and basic human rights. Among the setbacks encountered by CWSI, illiteracy rates in various rural communities is a major area of concern. Although publications are helpful tools which can be used to disseminate knowledge, it will be important to continue pursuing interactive forms of education in which everyone can participate. In regard to political participation, women who participated in CWSI workshops, have cited issues such as violence at polling booths, electoral violence, inadequate preparations, and rigging as problems that impede their willingness to participate in local politics.

Given the current state of the world, and the drastic increase of the marginalization of women due to the COVID-19 pandemic, in which more than 115 million people around the world are thrust into extreme poverty, it is now more important than ever to fully support women and girls. Additionally, access to education is at risk for the most vulnerable, with more than 365 million students left without access to formal education due to the pandemic. As women and girls across the globe continue to stay at home as a result of quarantine measures, literacy rates will decrease, violence against women is already increasing, and work towards gender equity continues to be compromised in ways we have yet to understand.

CWSI will focus on the following areas of critical concern in 2021, outlined based on the alignment with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA), adopted at the 4th Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. Our call to action, for not only ourselves, but the wider United Nations community, is in an effort to shed light on the critical need to acknowledge the threat of regressive patterns and behaviours associated with women's empowerment and rights due to the pandemic, as well as identify key proactive measures to promote prosperity, dignity, and freedom for women.

- **Violence against women** (Articles 5 and 6, Goal 16): CWSI is primarily involved with ending violence against women, researching the root causes of gender-based violence.

Furthermore, additional initiatives include lobbying legislators to make gender friendly laws which help address problems of marginalization and oppression of women.

According to the BPfA (paragraph 112), violence against women and girls is an impediment to equality and peace. Gender-based violence continues to impact women and girls negatively worldwide, as they continue to be unfairly discriminated against on the basis of their gender. Actions to be taken by different organizations and the government include:

- Organizing programmes and procedures to raise awareness of acts of violence against women (paragraph 125).
- Developing support programmes for girls and young women who have been or are involved in abusive relationships, particularly those who live in homes or institutions where abuse occurs (paragraph 125).

- **Women and the economy** (Articles 14 and 11, Goals 8 and 9): Centre for Women Studies and Intervention is highly involved in solving issues that women face in regard to employment and aims to prepare women to be economically independent and empowered. The organization strives to provide support to women so that they become active and viewed on a balanced basis with men.

Although women participate in both the formal and informal economy, there are disproportionate challenges that women face when compared to men. The BPfA highlights issues of bargaining power as a result of gender inequality, which makes it difficult for women to receive adequate pay and satisfactory work conditions (paragraph 150).

According to BPfA (paragraph 166), Non-Governmental Organizations can enhance economic empowerment for women by encouraging community economic development strategies that build partnerships among Governments, and encourage members of civil society to create jobs and address the social circumstances of individuals, families and communities.

- **Women in power and decision-making** (Articles 7, Goal 17): In order to address the exclusion of women from decision making, CWSI has partnered with Kogi Women Empowerment Coalition (a coalition of women's group founded by CWSI) which aims to include women in state decision making. CWSI has also held various workshops in recent years centred around women in politics. The purpose of these workshops was to educate women about the importance and necessity of their involvement in local politics. In addition to having these workshops which had a wide coverage in order to increase attendance, women who participated in these activities organized step-down training in their local areas.

The BPfA declares that equality in decision making is necessary for the empowerment of women. Women and men should be able to participate equally in government policy making, as everyone has a right to take part in their government (paragraph 181).

- **Human rights of women** (Articles 3 and 2): In order to promote human rights of women, CWSI is particularly interested in developing local education of human rights and gender sensitization. After organizing nation-wide workshops, The Legal Department monitored

areas in which CWSI had coverage in order to consolidate progress throughout various states.

- The BPfA establishes that human rights are fundamental freedoms which are to be granted to all human beings. Therefore, human rights ought to apply to everyone regardless of their gender. It is important for governments to recognize, protect, and promote the rights of women (paragraph 213).
- **The Girl-Child** (Articles 10 and 12, Goals 4 and 3): CWSI has held workshops and radio programmes, on International Women's Day and Day of the Girl-Child in order to inspire the girl-child to learn about the SDGs and gender-based violence. These workshops are also held with the aim to inspire and encourage young girls to amplify their voices and take actions toward breaking down gender stereotypes that limit their lives.

Discrimination against the Girl-Child is prominent and prevalent according to the BPfA (paragraph 260). Girls are often discriminated against at a very young age due to their gender. These existing gender inequalities diminish the voices of young girls and socialize them to believe they are inferior to boys. It is essential that girls are able to participate within their communities comfortably (paragraph 265).

## Conclusion

CWSI recognizes the importance of women in the prosperity of our local communities, our nation, and our support in the empowerment of all women as well as the protection and development of the girl child. CWSI has a significant role in addressing issues faced by women and girls; the organization aims to provide support in order to ensure that women are empowered and free from violence. CWSI also has had tremendous involvement in advocacy for women to be economically independent and evaluated on an equal basis.

CWSI calls upon the Commission on the Status of Women, UN Women, and all relevant United Nations entities to commit to ensuring the eradication of violence against women through appropriate legislative and policy measures.

CWSI calls upon the Commission on the Status of Women, UN Women, and all relevant United Nations entities to commit to providing adequate economic and social protection support for women's businesses to address the economic implications which women may suffer in the context of COVID-19 pandemic.

CWSI calls upon the Commission on the Status of Women, UN Women, and all relevant United Nations entities to commit to supporting and granting special quotas and affirmative action for women to fully participate in public decision making and creating a voice for women.

CWSI calls upon the Commission on the Status of Women, UN Women, and all relevant United Nations entities to commit to ensuring that all tenets of human rights are observed for women and that religion, culture and other traditional harmful practices would not be used to target women and deny them of their inalienable rights as human beings.

CWSI calls upon the Commission on the Status of Women, UN Women, and all relevant United Nations entities to commit to the protection of the rights of the girl child and abolishing of child marriages, child labour, trafficking of the girl child and other harmful practices against the girl child.

It is with great respect that CWSI humbly urges the Commission on the Status of Women to take all steps necessary for the protection and promotion of women and girls worldwide. The current pandemic has marginalized an already vulnerable group, it is vital to take fundamental action in order to empower women during these unprecedented times.