



PERMANENT MISSION OF NIGERIA TO THE UNITED NATIONS

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STATEMENT

BY

**HER EXCELLENCY
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HONOURABLE MINISTER OF WOMEN AFFAIRS
AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF NIGERIA**

AT THE

**52ND SESSION OF THE COMMISSION
ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN (CSW)**

New York, 27th February 2008

Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates

It is indeed a great honour to address the plenary session of the 52nd Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women. It is a pure delight to see so many Women and NGOs gathered here, bound by a common purpose, namely the continued struggle to improve the lot of Women. I would therefore like to seize this opportunity to commend the Commission for the excellent work it has been doing to advance the cause of women. Nigeria aligns herself with the statement made by Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

My delegation wishes to thank the Secretary-General of the United Nations for the launch of the campaign to end violence against women. We extend our thanks to the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women for her remarks. We also thank the Deputy Secretary-General for her launch of the Inter-agency Appeal on Female Genital Mutilation (FGM).

On this question, in line with Nigeria's commitment to relevant International Instrument, Government has made tremendous efforts towards eliminating the harmful practice of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) including the development of a National Policy and Plan of Action. This plan is expected to drastically reduce the prevalence and incidence of FGM in the country.

As a result, some states have since enacted laws prohibiting Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). Despite these efforts, the practice still persists, as some "practitioners" consider it as a "means of livelihood."

Mr. Chairman,

Nigeria has made strenuous efforts to promote gender equality and women empowerment by acceding to several policy instruments at global, regional and national levels. These include, among others, the Beijing Platform for Action, the Paris Declaration, the Millennium Development Goals Framework, the Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa, the ECOWAS Gender Policy and the Nigerian National Gender Policy developed in 2007.

We also note the emerging trends in Nigeria's macro-economic policy environment and the opportunities presented by such trends for an improvement in our drive towards poverty eradication. These efforts include the seven point agenda of the present government, Vision 20/20, the NEEDS review process and the establishment of a Virtual anti-Poverty Fund from the Debt Relief Gains.

In consonance with the conditions of the Debt Relief Gains (DRG), Nigeria channels \$1billion annually to pro-poor programs and projects through the Office of the Senior Special Assistant to the President on Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Therefore, since 2005, funds have been provided to the following Sectors that impact directly on the advancement of Women: Health, Youth, Education, Agriculture and Water Resources, Housing and Environment and Women Affairs and Social Development.

The underlisted areas have also been specifically targeted for financing Gender Equality and Women Empowerment from the Debt Relief Gains (DRGs):

- Integrated maternal and child health care
- Micro-credit for rural women farmers
- Women empowerment and skills acquisition
- HIV-AIDS and
- Political empowerment of women

Mr. Chairman,

The status of the Nigerian women has improved significantly in recent times. This has been greatly accelerated with the return of the country to democratic rule in 1999. There have been improvements in educational attainment by women and they have indeed attracted greater visibility, as more of them are being appointed to key positions in the public and private sectors.

However, in spite of these gains, women are still largely limited to certain occupations, due to work stereo-types. Most women, therefore, remain under-represented in many sectors of the economy. It is against this background that several schemes have been launched by the Federal Government to redress the gender imbalance.

Mr. Chairman,

It is heart warming that the priority theme of the 52nd Session of the Commission on the Status of Women is "Financing for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women." The 2007 National Gender Policy among other things, seeks to contribute towards women empowerment and the eradication of unequal gender power relations in the workplace, the economy and the broader society. The launching of the National General Policy was followed by a vigorous nationwide sensitization campaign.

Mr. Chairman,

The Federal Government has trained national legislators and budget officers of line Ministries on gender-sensitive budgeting. This was aimed at mainstreaming gender perspective into the national budget process, at the Federal, state and local government levels.

At the institutional level, the Federal Government has disbursed grants and subventions to women-focused NGOs, with a view to funding programmes, aimed at promoting gender equality and women empowerment. Women empowerment offices have been set up in the six geopolitical zones of the country to facilitate increased participation of women in the decision making process.

At the individual level, the Women Fund For Economic Empowerment (WOFEE) Scheme provides micro credit to Women Cooperative Societies, while the Business Development Fund for Women (BUDFOW) assists small and medium scale businesses owned by women entrepreneurs with funding.

Mr. Chairman,

With regard to “Women’s participation in conflict prevention, management and conflict resolution as well as in post-conflict peacebuilding,” Nigeria was one of the four countries selected to spear-head a pilot process on gender and peacekeeping. In this connection, an Inter-Ministerial Task Force on Gender and Peacekeeping has been inaugurated by the Federal Government and the Task Force is set to meet with women groups in order to carry out activities contained in the Action Plan.

In a related development, the First Lady of Nigeria, Her Excellency Hajia Turai Yar’Adua was elected two weeks ago as the President of the African First Ladies’ Peace Mission which is expected to garner political will towards implementing the Pilot Programme on gender mainstreaming and peacekeeping in Africa.

Mr. Chairman,

Surely, without sustained emphasis on the girl child education, efforts aimed at Women-focused policies and empowerment of women initiatives would come to naught. The Federal Government, under the free and compulsory Universal

Basic Education (UBE) and the Junior Secondary School segment, therefore seeks to more than triple girl child enrolment in Schools.

In order to bring about a more balanced development process, we call upon the relevant UN Agencies and our development partners to complement Government efforts by offering technical assistance and capacity-building towards the effective promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women.

Finally, we call upon the international community and indeed all stake-holders to rededicate themselves to translating words into action, that would not only improve the situation of Women, but impact profoundly upon the realization of the Internationally Agreed Development Goals and the MDGs.

Let us work together to make the world a better place for Women, Girls and Mankind.

I thank you.