



PERMANENT MISSION OF NIGERIA TO THE UNITED NATIONS

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STATEMENT

ON

ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN

BY

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AT THE

**GENERAL DEBATE OF THE THIRD COMMITTEE OF THE 64TH
SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

NEW YORK, October 13, 2009

Mr. Chairman,

At the outset, I wish to express my Government's commendation of the efforts of the UN Secretary General as well as the Division for the Advancement of Women towards the promotion and protection of the rights of women. In the same vein, I align with the statement made by Sudan on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. The 64th Session of the UN General Assembly presents us with an opportunity to review the progress and challenges in our quest for the advancement of women and gender equality.

The Nigerian government believes that the full implementation of internationally agreed commitments and declarations such as the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, as well as the outcome of the Twenty-third special session of the General Assembly and the Millennium Development Goals, are necessary to advance the national, regional and global agenda for the empowerment of women.

Nigeria attaches utmost importance to the issues contained in "Women 2000" and has been consistent in its commitment to gender mainstreaming through administrative and legal measures. Consequently, the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals, through Debt Relief Gains Financing, has greatly contributed to the advancement of the interests of women. In addition, gender responsive programmes are constantly being strengthened to address emerging challenges.

Mr. Chairman,

To realize the goal of halving female poverty ratio by 2015 and strengthen women's economic security, the Government of Nigeria has put in place poverty reduction strategies, such as the Women Fund for Economic Empowerment (WOFEE), a funding window for providing credit to women co-operatives in partnership with the Nigerian Agricultural Cooperative and Rural Development Bank. A total of 818 women group co-operatives with 17,049 members have received funding so far through the programme.

Furthermore, to boost women entrepreneurship, including reducing the stringent conditions for assessing bank loans, my Ministry, in collaboration with the Bank of Industry, established the Business Development Fund for Women (BUDFOW), a soft credit facility targeted at women entrepreneurs. This is in addition to various cottage industries and skills acquisition centers being established across the country. Commercial Banks in the country have also been proactive in reducing women's poverty, through the establishment of various loan schemes at lower interest rates, thereby making them more productive and self-reliant. A programme for 'Empowering Young Female Graduates' also exists to boost entrepreneurial activities among women.

Mr. Chairman,

There has been a progressive improvement in the literacy level of women. Also, a net enrolment ratio in primary education has consistently increased over the years. The steady rise in women's literacy level is linked to Government's educational policies, increased budgetary allocations and the proliferation of various continuing education and vocational centers across the country.

In furtherance of the present administration's policy on human development, the provision of basic education for all children of school age, improved formal and non-formal education curriculum for girls, access to school and the establishment of 'Second Chance Educational Programme for Girls' who have dropped out of school as a result of pregnancy are some of the measures taken by Government to enhance female education.

Mr. Chairman,

Women continue to play an increasing role in the ongoing political reform in the country. Women organizations, under the aegis of Coalition of Women Groups in Nigeria, have in the last one year been in the forefront of mobilizing women political leaders, gender experts, legal practitioners, partners and distinguished scholars in the country to advocate for improvements in the conduct of elections. Progressive agitation for 30 – 35% Affirmative Action in favour of women to bridge gender gaps in both elective and appointive posts at all levels by 2015 has also led to increase in the number of women appointed to key

positions. Currently, the number of female senior civil servants is put at 22.5%, while judicial appointments across the 36 States of the Federation constitute about 30%. A marginal increase has also been witnessed in elective and appointive posts but the proportion of seats occupied by women show that their representation in politics is still relatively low.

Mr. Chairman,

To further promote women's rights, a National Action Plan on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights in Nigeria was developed by the Government and deposited with the United Nations Human Rights Committee in Geneva in July 2009, with a chapter devoted to the rights of women and children. A National Policy on Sexual Harassment in Educational Institutions has also been put in place. All sectors of the Nigerian society, including Civil Society Groups and the Mass Media, are all united in the quest to ensure a society devoid of violence against women. Temporary shelters including free medical treatments for female victims of domestic and sexual violence are being established nationwide, with stringent measures and penalties meted to rapists of innocent girls and women.

In our quest to enhance the rights of the girl - child, an appraisal of girls' education initiatives and best practices on girl-child in Nigeria was commissioned by Government in 2008. This is with a view to developing a proactive, practical and participatory intervention programme that will enhance girls' education. Other measures adopted by Government to improve girl-child education include: recruitment of more female teachers from catchment communities; adoption of legal frameworks; skill acquisition programs for girls and women; provision of textbooks at subsidized rates; provision of a girl-friendly environment; and the establishment of Female Education Boards. Others include the provision of girls-only schools, reduction or removal of direct cost of schooling, second chance for drop-outs, married women and pregnant girls, mentoring and tutoring of girls.

Judges and Magistrates are continuously being trained on gender and women's rights. Some court judgments now reflect the impact of such training. For instance, an administrative policy of the Nigeria Immigration Service that compels a married woman to produce a letter of consent from her husband as a condition for issuance of an international passport was declared by a High Court Judge to be a violation of the Nigerian Constitution and the West African Charter on the People's and Human Rights.

Mr. Chairman,

In recognition of the close link between women's health and their emotional, social and physical well being, health system facilities are being scaled up and issues addressed through advocacy and social mobilization, community systems strengthening, expanding human resource and strengthening coordination. The impact of these have shown a reduction in infant mortality rate by 25% from 100/1000 live births in 2003 to 75 per 1000 live births in 2008 and a 22% reduction in childhood mortality from 201/1000 live births in 2003 to 157 per 1000 live births in 2008.

Notwithstanding the above achievements, there remains a number of challenges. For example, the proportion of women seeking ante – and post – natal medical care remains low and this poses one of the greatest challenges in the efforts to reduce maternal mortality in the country. Less than two-thirds of pregnant women received antenatal care, only about half were attended to at delivery by skilled attendants, and less than half received post-natal care. Despite this alarming situation, my Government is committed to meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and other related international goals as embodied in the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) Program of Action through the Integrated Maternal, Newborn and Child Health Strategy (IMNCH).

Similarly, my Government has intensified advocacy and Social mobilization for Policy Makers in States, and for Parliamentarians, Communities, Traditional Rulers and Civil Society organizations. These are in addition to Baseline Study on Maternal Health Indicators and the Survey on Strategic Social Framework on Reduction of Maternal and Child Deaths. Training of Traditional Birth Attendants (TBA's) has also been upscaled to meet the challenges at the grassroot levels.

I wish to put on record the commendable efforts of Nigeria's First Lady, H. E. Hajiya (Dr.) Turai Yar'Adua in advancing the course of women through initiatives such as high level advocacy in maternal and child health, the economic empowerment of women and youths, as well as peace initiatives within and outside the country.

Mr. Chairman,

Global partnership and effective national coordination remain critical challenges to the advancement of women. To ameliorate this, we have adopted a National Gender Policy with its Strategic Implementation Framework and Plan to strengthen institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women. There has also been an active and enhanced participation of women's civil society in the monitoring and evaluation of national, regional and international initiatives in the country, including the formulation and revision of domestic laws, policies and regulations as they affect women.

While acknowledging various gains that have been made, there are still some gaps in the full implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women and other international instruments on the advancement of women.

In the light of the foregoing, improved technical and financial support from development partners is key to the achievement of the goal of advancing the interest and welfare of women and girls. My delegation wishes to express its support for the 'Resolution for a New United Nations Gender Equality entity based on the Composite Model' as a veritable model for the UN, and for global action, in favour of women. We urge other delegations to do likewise.

I thank you.