



PERMANENT MISSION OF NIGERIA TO THE UNITED NATIONS

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STATEMENT

By

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HONOURABLE MINISTER, FEDERAL MINISTRY
OF WOMEN AFFAIRS AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND
HEAD OF THE NIGERIAN DELEGATION**

AT THE

**FORMAL PRESENTATION OF NIGERIA'S SIXTH PERIODIC
REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONVENTION
ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF
DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN (CEDAW)
TO THE UNITED NATIONS CEDAW COMMITTEE**

NEW YORK, 3RD JULY, 2008

**Madam Chairperson,
Distinguished Members of the Committee,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

On behalf of the Government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, it is my honour and privilege to present the sixth periodic report on the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women in Nigeria.

The Nigerian Government commends the efforts of the Committee at ensuring the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women; and takes very seriously the issues raised in the concluding comments on 4th and 5th Periodic Report as well as the 6th Report.

The Sixth Report

Nigeria signed and ratified the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), in 1985 and 1991 respectively. This Report covers the July 2002 and July 2006 period.

Madam Chairperson,

It may interest you to note that, Nigeria has made some progress towards the implementation of the Convention since her last appearance before the Committee in January 2004.

Discrimination against Women

The enabling environment created by the return to democratic rule of the nation's polity has given rise to a vibrant civil society, engaged in the promotion and protection of the human rights of women and girls as well as freedom from all forms of discrimination. Pertinent actions include the design and implementation of programmes and activities aimed at challenging structures and systems that often negate the definition of non-discrimination, disempower women and promote inequalities. The women machinery at both the Federal and State levels has been very active in the quest for gender equity and equality. Nigerian women leaders at the National Assembly are also very vocal on issues of gender mainstreaming and empowerment. Only recently, Nigerian women under the aegis of Gender Electoral and Constitution Memoranda Committee have demanded 35 per cent of elective positions at all tiers of Government in the country.

In a three-volume submission to the National Electoral Reform Committee last week in Abuja, the women also advocated the repeal of all laws, including the Constitution and the Electoral Act, militating against women participations in politics and the holding of elective positions in the country.

As at today, the CEDAW domestication draft Bill tagged "A Bill for an Act to Provide for the Enforcement of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination Of All Forms Of Discrimination Against Women in the Federal Republic of Nigeria and for the Purposes Connected Therewith- 2005" is under consideration as an Executive Bill by the National Assembly.

However, we strongly believe that the on-going Constitutional and Electoral Reform processes will not only ensure gender mainstreaming in the Constitution and Affirmative Action but also fast-track the passage of the CEDAW Bill at the National Assembly.

Development and Promotion of Women

The Federal Government, introduced the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS), with the policy thrust to significantly improve the quality of life of Nigerians and create social safety nets for vulnerable groups, particularly women and youths. NEEDS focuses on four key strategies: reorienting values, reducing poverty, creating wealth and generating employment.

Violence against Women

In order to address the incessant violence against women, the Nigeria Police in June 2006, launched the Human Rights Desk in all Police Stations. Police officers also undergo human rights training to enable them uphold women's rights as human rights in their dealings with the public, especially in cases relating to violence and sexual harassment.

Similarly, judicial pronouncements from different courts within the three legal systems in the country are beginning to show an inclination for activism to remove arbitrariness in the way women's issues are addressed. Cases decided in the lower court are contented in the higher courts of appeal, enjoining judges to pay attention to constitutional provisions and Nigeria's obligations under international law, while dealing with such cases.

In the same vein, legal clinics have been set up to provide affordable legal aid to women including counseling, mediation and other alternative Dispute Resolution methods. The Nigerian Government has also introduced Reproductive Rights and Maternal Health Education in school curriculum with a view to increasing awareness and understanding of the issues at stake.

In addition, temporary shelters, including free medical treatment for female victims of domestic and sexual violence, have been established nationwide, while stringent measures and penalties ranging from 2 – 14 years' imprisonment are meted to rapists. Intensive grassroots public enlightenment strategies are also in place to address the issue.

HIV/AIDS and Gender Dimensions

A 'Gender Technical Committee' has been established by the consortium of development partners, foundations, UN organizations, and Federal Ministry of Health. This committee, in collaboration with the National Agency for the Control of AIDS (NACA) has successfully mainstreamed gender into the HIV/AIDS National Strategic Framework for Action (NSF) 2005-2009. The Committee's contribution to the mainstreaming of gender into HIV/AIDS policies and programmes is ongoing, while the NSF serves as a model in the West African sub-region for addressing the gender dimension of HIV/AIDS pandemic.

Abolition of All Forms of Trafficking and Exploitation

The passage of Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Law Enforcement and Administration Act, 2003 (TIPLEA) as amended was a landmark event. The law specifically set up a crime fighting Agency called National Agency for the Prohibition of Traffic in Persons and Other Related Matters (NAPTIP) to address all issues relating to Trafficking in Persons (TIP), especially women and children.

As at the time of this report, the Agency, in collaboration with other relevant bodies, has successfully prosecuted 20 human traffickers with over 65 other cases pending in various courts. Over 1,500 victims have passed through counseling services with 45 fully rehabilitated and reintegrated.

In order to address factors such as poverty that increase vulnerability to Trafficking, the Nigerian Government has adopted a holistic approach by conducting necessary research. This would identify and enumerate areas where there is likelihood of vulnerability to enable Government intervene with micro credit facilities and skill acquisition and training programmes with a view to reducing vulnerability of persons likely to be trafficked.

Representation at the International Level

Foreign Service regulations apply equally to men and women. Employment into the service is based on equal representation from all the states of the Federation. It is worthy of note that the 2001 recruitment exercise by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs showed that twenty-four (24)

female officers were employed. This represents 27.03% of the total employment that year. The 2008 exercise saw 36 female officers employed. At the international level, the President of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Court of Justice, the Secretary-General of ECOWAS Parliament, the Vice-President (Africa) of the World Bank and a Managing Director of the World Bank are Nigerian women. However, in spite of these numbers, there is still palpable disparity in favour of male representation.

Women in Political and Public Life

A number of strategic measures have been taken since the submission of the 6th Report in July 2006, some of which include policy declarations and progress achieved, namely: Progressive agitation for 30% Affirmative Action in favour of women to bridge gender gaps in both elective and appointive posts at all levels by 2015 has led to the increase in the number of females appointed to key portfolios such as First Female Speaker of the House of Representative, First Female Head of the Civil Service of the Federation and appointment of Female Ministers as well as Heads of Parastatal and other key offices.

Madam Chairperson, I wish to state that, there has been a steady increase of 2% in the number of women elected into the legislative arm of Government over the past three general elections. This undoubtedly goes to show that the discrimination

hitherto experienced by women in politics is gradually fading away.

Women and Education:

In engendering community participation for improved access to education, four thousand, five hundred and twenty five (4,525) educationally disadvantaged communities in ten States of the federation have benefited from massive training programmes held at the community level under the self help component of the World Bank Assisted Second Primary Education Project (PEP). This is an ongoing process in the country that is aimed at boosting girl-child education in Nigeria. In the same vein the Universal Compulsory Education is also another concrete measure by Government to ensure that girls have access to free primary and secondary education. There has been increased advocacy and sensitization to Policy makers, Community and Religious Leaders, Supply of Essential Learning Packages, Capacity Building of Stakeholders and others under Girl Child Education Project.

Discriminatory employment practices

Madam Chairperson,

It is worth mentioning, that there are no manifest discriminatory laws or policies against women in recruitment and employment. However, the ratio of men to women employed in the formal sector is very much in favour of men. In order to address this imbalance, there are relevant programmes being implemented by the Government at Local, State and Federal levels respectively designed to meet the country's development challenges.

Women and Health

Maternal deaths, together with child mortality have continued to be one of the most serious development challenges in the country. Maternal mortality in Nigeria is extremely high, compared to other countries. In its efforts therefore, to address the problem and meet the MDGs in this critical area, the Government has taken the following bold measures amongst others:

- Increased budgetary allocation to the health sector at all levels of governance to ensure adequate Primary Health

Care facilities, and increase in health manpower at both rural and urban areas;

- Aggressive advocacy campaign and consultation by stakeholders and the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, since 2005 with policy makers, implementers, traditional, religious and community leaders at state and local government levels;
- Additional monitoring structures have been established at all levels with clearly defined roles and responsibilities and reporting lines.

Marriage and Family Relations:

In order to improve marriage and family relations, the Government mandated the Nigerian Law Reform Commission in 2006 to embark upon the reform of Nigerian Family Law in three phases. The Commission has reported on the initial phase review of the different family law systems and hopes to complete the harmonization process by the year 2009 in relation to Article 16 of CEDAW.

Women in Rural Areas:

In achieving integrated rural development and increased agricultural production, various tiers of governments have provided subsidies in respect of infrastructure, fertilizer, improved agricultural extension services, harvesting of the country's water resources and development of small-scale rural agro-industries.

In the same manner, the National Policy on Education 2004 provides support for adult and non-formal education, including curriculum development, mobile and rural libraries, television viewing and audio-listening centres as well as studio-visual teaching and learning aids.

Women and the Economy:

To further improve the status of Women particularly rural women, the Women Fund for Economic Empowerment (WOFEE), a funding window to provide credit to women co-operatives was established and is being implemented 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 through the programme.

In the same manner, in its efforts to boost women entrepreneurs' economic status and reduce the stringent conditions for getting bank loans by women, the Ministry of Women Affairs, in collaboration with the Bank of Industry has established the Business Development Fund for Women (BUDFOW), a soft credit facility targeted to benefit women entrepreneurs.

Women and Peace Building:

As part of our efforts to promote and protect human rights, democracy and peaceful settlements of disputes, including increased participation of women in conflict resolution, prevention and peacekeeping and peace-building, the Ministry established an Inter-Ministerial Task Force on Gender and Peace-Keeping in September 2007.

In appreciation of Nigeria's commitment to national and regional conflicts prevention and peace promotion, Her Excellency, the First Lady, Hajiya Turai Yar'Adua was elected as the President of the African First Ladies Peace Mission for a two-year tenure at the 6th African First Ladies Peace Mission Summit, held in Congo, Brazzaville, February 2008.

Madam Chairperson,

Before we enter into dialogue, I would like to once again reaffirm Nigeria's full commitment to the implementation of the Convention and reiterate her dedication to the reporting process to this distinguished Committee. Nigeria believes the Convention is a critical barometer against which we assess our own progress in view of the fact that the elimination of discrimination against women benefits society as a whole.

I am, indeed, glad that each reporting period has been an opportunity for Nigeria to report on progress being slowly but steadily made towards eliminating discrimination against women. In spite of challenges, the Nigerian Government is engaged and committed to achieving gender equality, women empowerment and improvement in the situation of the less privileged members of our society most of whom happened to be women.

My delegation and I look forward to a fruitful dialogue today.

I thank you for your kind attention.