



## **Economic and Social Council**

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

#### **Fifty-seventh session**

4-15 March 2013

**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and  
to the special session of the General Assembly entitled  
“Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace  
for the twenty-first century”: implementation of strategic  
objectives and action in critical areas of concern and  
further actions and initiatives**

### **Statement submitted by Centa for Organizational Development, 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.



## Statement

Centa for Organizational Development is pleased to join other non-governmental organizations in consultative status to submit a statement on the priority theme. The organization welcomes the theme with strong support and with a call for action on a collaborative response initiative between victims and survivors, States parties, including Governments at the national, state and local levels, as well as civil society organizations and the private sector.

The organization has partnered community projects and outreach capacity-building programmes for women and girls with the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development Abuja, the Lagos State Ministry of Women Affairs and Poverty Alleviation and other Government agencies committed to zero tolerance of all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls.

The organization played an active role in the research and documentation of Nigeria's sixth country report to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, in 2008. In 2011, we piloted research on documented and undocumented cases of violence against women and girls in Nigeria with five Government agencies, including the Nigerian Police, the Office of the Public Defender, the National Human Rights Commission, the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons, and the Lagos State Ministry of Women Affairs and Poverty Alleviation.

The research showed that between January 2008 and December 2011 there were over 50 reported cases of girl child abuses that ranged from child molestation, incest and rape, to child labour. We recorded over 150 documented cases of violence against women, often leading to deaths. We observed that for every reported case, there were at least five unreported cases, implying that women in Nigeria live with one form of abuse or the other. The situation is worse in Muslim-dominated northern Nigeria, where girls between the ages of 9 and 12 are forced into early marriages, with its attendant consequences that include Vesicovaginal fistula, a terrible health hazard. Islamic laws do not allow women to express their rights in Nigeria. Women are neither to be seen nor heard. They are to live under the control of their husbands, brothers or uncles. Many do not have a right to qualitative education except for a few weeks in an Arabic school.

Recently, the Boko Haram Islamic insurgents in Northern Nigeria that connotes western education as bad have worsened situations on violence against women for women and girls, subjecting them to environments dominated by violence. Out of fear of Boko Haram insurgents, most girls and young women have shunned attending any form of school. Many are confined indoors. It is important to note that the inability of Nigeria's National Assembly to pass the domestic violence bill after 13 years of uninterrupted democracy is due largely to the resistances from Muslim legislators, who see the bill as being at odds with their cultural Islamic beliefs. Three times a women's bill of rights has been submitted to the National Assembly; three times it did not pass the first reading.

Very recently, there was a celebrated case of Mercy Nnadi, whose live-in lover burned her with an electric iron on 7 April 2012 in Okota, Lagos, inflicting first degree burns. With the collaborative response initiative of the organization, Project Alert on Violence against Women, the Zahara Women Foundation and the Lagos State Ministry of Women Affairs and Poverty Alleviation, her hospital bill of over

\$6,000 was paid, and she was accommodated in the Lagos State Government's transit shelter for battered women between July and October 2012. On 8 November 2012, the non-governmental organizations secured accommodation for her with a seed grant of \$1,000 to start her life again, perhaps even better. Meanwhile, her estranged lover is still in detention at Kirikiri maximum security prison, awaiting trial for criminal homicide, having killed the only child from the relationship. To many in Nigeria, this is one isolated success story. Most victims of domestic violence hardly survive to tell their story.

The organization, in considering the words "elimination" and "prevention", noted that the elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls and its prevention strategies are necessary for sustainable development of any nation from the grass-roots level to the national level. Violence against women affects leadership at the family, community, local, state, national and international levels. Yet it has received limited attention in research, the policymaking process, documented and undocumented data, as well as specific interventions.

These gaps and challenges must be given required attention from all stakeholders and collaborative responses sought in order to achieve the complete elimination of violence against women. Many women experience partner violence and have been physically and sexually assaulted by intimate partners.

The organization has observed that forms of violence, including physical, sexual, psychological, battery, sexual abuse of female children and marital rape, occur as a result of frustration from poverty, stress from crisis, drugs and alcohol intake, hatred, ego and pride. Exhibition of authority, inherited attitude or character, couple enslavement and marital conflict have the capacity to transform marital bliss and understanding into various forms of violence.

We note that society plays a major and contributing role in violence against women, especially if it is patriarchal. Societal norms of granting men control over female behaviour, acceptance of violence as a means to resolve violence, understanding on the part of men to associate masculinity with dominance, aggression and inflexible gender roles have remained causes of violence against women.

Violence against women and girls has religious, social and cultural implications, yet domestic violence occurs every day with negative adverse effects on the women and girls. Elimination and prevention tools need a holistic approach to provide adequate security and protection for women and girls. These could include education, resources for research and information, access and empowerment opportunities, grass-roots communities, initiatives to empower women and girls on human rights and productive capacity-building.

An integrated multi-sectoral approach to gender equality through a collaborative response initiative that creates avenues for sustainable personal development is important. Such an initiative would have the capacity to transform systems, institutions and agencies. Women and girls should be provided with environmental and societal enablement that could help them take their rightful place in society. Men should be made to acknowledge the severity of the burden that women carry every day of their lives and adore them instead of violating them.

The United Nations, since its inception, has carried out its global goals, missions, programmes and projects through collaborative efforts and has made

committed successes in spite of the numerous divergent challenges. After its establishment, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women called on women's groups and organizations for partnerships and collaboration to help achieve the goal of gender equality and empowerment of women. Operational committees and working groups at the United Nations are brought together to collaborate in order to enable them to achieve their set of goals.

The organization is firmly rooted on this premise and strongly affirms that, to eliminate and prevent all forms of violence against women, there should be a collaboration of all stakeholders, working groups, international and women organizations, Governments and grass-roots working groups, with the participation of men and boys and violated women and girls who are allowed to dialogue about their personal stories as a response initiative.

Dialogue, responses, resolutions, policies and advocacy should be built on the strength and outcome of the collaborative response initiative. This will tend to strengthen strategic frameworks in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women. More women and girls will participate freely in the governance, grass-roots mobilizations and decision-making that is needed in order to overcome fears from all forms of discrimination and violence against them.

State machinery for intervention on issues of discrimination and violence against women in Nigeria is very weak and often lack the capacity to seek redress for victims. Violence against women is often treated as issues in the private domain, depriving victims of the will and opportunity to seek legal and legitimate redress.

Most non-governmental organizations focusing on care and support programmes for victims lack the long-term funds and grants required for sustained support. There are also not enough resources for awareness creation and sensitization campaigns among teenagers and the girl child to teach them to recognize and heed the early warning signs.

As the Commission on the Status of Women prepares the world for its fifty-seventh session in New York, we implore the Commission to use its vantage position to draw the attention of the Government of Nigeria to what needs to be done to eliminate all forms of discrimination and violence against women, especially in Nigeria.

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