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Statement submitted by Okogun Odigie Safewomb International Foundation, 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

Inculcating African traditional values in the prevention and elimination of violence against women and girls; the role of mothers of values

In his poem, “The hand that rocks the cradle is the hand that rules the world”, William Ross Wallace emphasizes motherhood as the pre-eminent force for positive change in the world. Such positive thoughts are the ingredients of non-violence, peace and equality. Positive African family core values hinge on respect for life and dignity, motherhood and recognized feminine roles. Failure to respect these core values can lead to misunderstandings between men and women and to violence against women and girls. Specific problems include:

(a) **Motherhood versus womanhood.** It is a taboo to raise your hand against your mother but society looks the other way when a man strikes or maltreats his wife and girl children. This is being addressed by advocating for coeducational schools so that there is mutual respect and by creating awareness about the commonality between womanhood and motherhood;

(b) **Expensive traditional marriage rites.** Expensive traditional marriage rites often lead to misunderstanding and bad blood among in-laws and spouses. Concerted efforts have led to some progress, and a state in Nigeria has now abolished such rites; with even greater efforts, more progress could be gained in the near future. Respected women members of the Edo tribe have been lobbied to look into the matter. Communities are helping to create awareness, through role models in schools and mentors, that expensive traditional marriage rites do not lead to success but actually fuel violence;

(c) **Early marriage.** The trauma of early separation from one’s family, friends and environment, inexperience about family life and complication from pregnancies when the body is not physically ready can contribute to difficulties in a marriage. Polygamy and the fact that young brides have no earning power often exacerbate the situation;

(d) **Widows’ inheritance.** This needs to be regulated through legal instruments. Loss of a breadwinner often results in grief, poverty in the family, superstition, displacement, prostitution, fear, stigmatization, discrimination, suppression and loss of self-esteem etc;

(e) **Polygamy with attendant sociocultural and economic problems.** When a man is allowed to take more than one wife, clashes among different personalities, economic challenges, problems attendant to large families, the struggle for space and attention and even sexual satisfaction fuel violence;

(f) **Multiplicity of religions.** Families with diverse religious views find it difficult to come together. African brides immerse themselves in traditional religion and spirituality, which they take very seriously. They can identify with ancestral gods, sacred groves, rivers and forests. New religions from the West and Middle East have never been well-accepted. They lead to confusion in the family’s belief system; everyone is free to worship the God of their choice but some may decide not to believe in any God, all within the same family and household. The resulting spiritual struggles for supremacy and recognition have resulted not only in domestic

violence but also community and even regional conflicts that even the United Nations has been trying to quell;

(g) **Influence of politics.** Along with religion came Western-style politics. This can be one of the most destructive instruments in the hands of a misguided person or community. When family members belong to different political parties, there can never be cooperation or collaboration. The situation is usually more chaotic than when they believe in different religions. Separation and divorce have resulted in some cases. At times, offspring from such homes may turn to political thugs and cultists. Such homes are sometimes burned down and economic activities disturbed and destroyed;

(h) **Education and women's empowerment.** Owing to efforts by religious communities, government policies, the activities of international agencies, activism by women's groups and public-awareness campaigns, more women are being given a Western education, which has helped immensely in their emancipation and given them visibility and equality with men. The attitude of some women towards this emancipation and the lack of receptiveness on the part of their male partners, particularly at home or at work, at times lead to various types of violence;

(i) **Urbanization and globalization.** The effects of urbanization and globalization on eroding African family values cannot be overemphasized. Men and society in general may find certain attitudes, ways of dressing and even cuisine outrageous, and their reactions may be uncontrollable.

Prevention and elimination of violence

Leadership role of the United Nations

According to a popular adage, "Prevention is better than cure." The international community has long recognized the anomaly in human rights violations worldwide and the importance of protecting women's rights and values. Preventative measures at the international level include the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Violence against Women, the outcomes of the World Conferences on Women, particularly the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) and the Millennium Development Goals. Recognition of the rights of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.

Our Foundation strives to create awareness in order to put an end to violence against women and girls or at least lower the incidence of such violence. Informal persuasive talks at schools, public gatherings and home visits offer a peaceful atmosphere to talk about values and non-violence, with amazing results. The Government of Nigeria is also showing more commitment to promoting positive core values. Hopefully, this will help to prevent and eliminate violence against women and girls.