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**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 *Ensemble luttons contre le sida*["Fighting AIDS together"], 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

Women's ownership of their own advancement and development and of their immediate environment

The role of women, as we see it, cannot be reduced to receiving assistance: they must also participate actively in finding solutions to the problems that concern them. This is the concept that we want to see prevail in all countries, and we encourage women to carry the torch for development not only in their own community but in the country as a whole.

We expect all partners to have a vision based on women's participation in and ownership of the activities involved in their advancement and development. The Democratic Republic of Congo is one of the countries where the question of women's development and advancement arises most acutely, given the repeated armed conflicts in the country.

We note that there has been much progress on this question, but there is still a long way to go. The complexity of the question of Congolese women is such that in order to appreciate it properly we must begin at its very roots, since the question is bound up in culture and customs that have in fact contributed greatly to the deterioration of women's role in Congolese society.

With the support of various partners, we are constantly coordinating efforts to help promote women's advancement and to combat sexual violence against women, so as not only to ensure their development but, above all, to restore their tarnished image. For this situation has prevented women from flourishing and from adding these true values to our country's development. Some significant efforts have already been made in this direction. The President of the Republic, Joseph Kabila, recently undertook to increase female representation in the provincial assemblies to more than 30% and to promote the hiring of women at all levels.

Those efforts do not exclude the search for lasting solutions to the problems that are holding back women's development in our country, given that the search for solutions to this problem must necessarily start at the grassroots. Hence the question of women's ownership of their advancement and development and of their immediate environment. Thus, an in-depth effort integrating women's participation in the search for solutions had been introduced into our initiative to promote women's active participation. For there is today an arsenal of laws, both national and international, to promote the role and the development of women in society. And we have thought it timely to reorient actions towards women's ownership of and participation in this heavy undertaking.

In this context, we place the emphasis on raising awareness about the protection and advancement of women's rights through the promotion of leadership, education and the protection of women as well as through the struggle against impunity in cases where women's rights are violated (in particular, sexual and gender-based violence).