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entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and
peace for the twenty-first century”

Statement submitted by Partnership for Justice Ltd/Gte, 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.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Priority Theme — Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls through participation in and access of women to the media, and information and communication technologies and their impact on and use as instrument for the advancement and empowerment of women.

Preamble:

The Group of 6 organisations (G6) affirms all actions undertaken by the Nigerian government in areas of legal reform, the establishment of a Committee on Reform of Discriminatory Laws against Women and children, passage of Violence against Persons Prohibition Act. Overall, there has been an increasing consciousness amongst Nigerians on the negative impact of stereotyping, which limits the ability and willingness of women to access and participate in communication systems. Awareness creation on gender issues has been one of the major measures put in place to address the issue of gender stereotypes that impede the progress of women and girls in the country. Government and Non-Governmental Organisations are increasingly working in collaboration with strategies partners to conduct awareness programmes. These programmes ensure the gradual but steady erosion from the roots the culture of male superiority and lack of participation of women and girls in the media.

The situation

International human rights law requires that states parties take adequate measures to ensure the participation of women and men in equal terms to development which includes media and other forms of life. Nigeria is a party to multiple human rights treaties that protect these rights. However, it has failed to meet many of its treaty obligations with respect to ensuring women and men's access to and use of media.

In particular instances, there has not been significant difference in terms of perception of women's capacity to participate; for instance, postings that depict women as sex objects are still common occurrences. Women are still the minority of those that convey these experiences, as most are still told through the eyes of the man without regard to the women's perspective that make it to the media. Portraying women as sex objects fuels the level of attacks on women — either being stripped of their clothing for perceived infraction of social norms or outright personal, and often violent, attacks, such as sexual assault and rape. Women are generally marginalized in the ownership structure of the media. The licensing burden is such that few women are able to mobilize the resources to process and own licenses to operate major media outlets like radio and television. Furthermore, women are poorly represented in the information and communication technologies industry as majority of persons in the sector are men and, even when government or private sector provides capacity building through scholarships or skills acquisition programs, the industry does not see information and communication technologies as 'good fit' for women and remains male dominated.

The number of women in the journalism profession in Nigeria is exceptionally low. Although statistics have shown that the percentage of enrolment of women and men in Mass Communication departments in Universities is 8:1, few women end up

practicing journalism as a career or subsequently attain the Editor's level when they do become journalists, women are often found heading the 'soft' departments such as features, entertainment, and lifestyle while their male counterparts are assigned the 'hard' news. Nigerian society remains reluctant to embrace measures aimed at closing the gender gap in various spheres of life which was created through years of discrimination, oppression and suppression of women. Discrimination continues to shape gender relations and identities at national, local, household and individual levels, contributing to the perpetuation of gendered inequalities.

Cultural and traditional practices still inhibit and affect women's portrayal in the media, this affects rural women who most times are expected to remain quiet, submissive and without opinion.

Although there has been a lot of progress with regard to laws and policies, there is still a general lack of awareness and enforcement of existing laws and a slow response to change. There has not been adequate effort by government at all levels to provide alternative source of energy which can power telecommunications and women's phones in rural communities.

Recommendations:

Government and civil society groups should partner to constantly train and retrain media, Nollywood and private media organisations to be sensitive in their reporting;

Women-focused organisations should consider engaging media as partners to ensure their commitment to focus on women's issue from an ideological point of view;

Mainstreaming and monitoring of a gender perspective in all information and communication technologies initiatives;

Collecting sex disaggregated data on the use of information and communication technologies and women's;

Participation in policy-making as well as developing targets, indicators and benchmarks to track the progress of women's and girl's access to the benefits of information and communication technologies;

Identifying and promoting good practices and lessons learned on the ways women and girls are using information and communication technologies;

Government should support institutions and private agencies to embrace gender mainstreaming and gender responsive policies.
