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

Statement submitted by Tabitha Cumi 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.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Education for marginalized girls: a panacea for poverty reduction

The world is set to mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women and adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which flagged 12 key areas where urgent action was needed to ensure greater equality and opportunities for women, men, girls, and boys. It also laid out concrete ways for countries to bring about change. It has become imperative for organization and state actors to re-evaluate and ensure that we are meeting the targets of the critical areas flagged.

When women are deprived their rights are not protected and they face double discrimination on account of their gender and economic situation. Education is essential for women to reach gender equality and become leaders of change. While the Tabitha Cumi Foundation acknowledges that the good number of women and girls are getting educated, there is still a wide gap that exists that needs to be closed.

Nearly 3.5 billion people, more than half the world's population, live in nine highly populated developing countries (E-9) that together represent tremendous challenges that weigh heavily on the global education agenda. These countries, of which Nigeria is one, are yet to achieve universal primary education, and all face major education quality deficits. The number of girls who lack the basic learning tools to make informed decisions and participate fully in the development of their societies is alarming. Literacy remains a significant challenge in Nigeria. Tackling the literacy gap is both a moral and developmental imperative for governments, donor countries, and non-governmental organizations.

Nigeria is currently facing a number of human security challenges, such as poverty, social unrest, hunger, disease, conflict, and marginalization, and it needs to meet targets for the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. According to the Human Development Report (UNDP, 1994), in order to address these growing challenges, a new development paradigm is called for – one that will put marginalized girls at the centre of development, with regard to economic growth and poverty reduction. To this end, the Tabitha Cumi Foundation affirms that education is one of the social institutions through which nations turn their population into assets and hence one of the institutions that contributes to the construction and maintenance of social order and progress.

In the course of implementing programs for adolescent girls for years, the Tabitha Cumi Foundation has observed a very wide gap that needs to be closed. There are marginalized girls ages 15–25 who are young married adolescents, heads of households, widowed, caring for their sick or aged parents, disabled, suffer learning difficulties, have never been to school, are single mothers, and more, who are gradually evolving into the next generation of women in poverty due to a lack of or low-level education and skills, which are needed to help them escape from the vicious cycle of poverty. Education is the way out of these social inequalities.

Education prepares people for employment and productive contributions. It is a way of reducing social inequalities, when executed with excellence. Education benefits the individual, family, society, and the economy. By law, young women who are above formal school age are required to enroll in non-formal sector, adult, and non-formal education programs that offer basic literacy, functional literacy and post-literacy courses. However, young women are generally are unaware that these programs are available to them.

To achieve the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action on education and women, government, donor agencies, and other organization must make a concerted effort to provide functional literacy, remedial literacy, and continuing education for marginalized girls and young women who have not had the advantage of formal education or who did not complete their primary or secondary education.

The need for non-formal education cannot be overemphasized. Since it is structured education that takes place outside of an organized school setting, these marginalized groups could take advantage of the opportunity, learn at their pace, and not feel inferior. It will equip them with skills that enhance their income generation and improve their self-reliance. With an effective skills development program, the burden placed on these young girls would be reduced, and they would be able to contribute meaningfully to society, reducing poverty and ensuring that their wards embrace education and practice healthy behaviors.

With the right support mechanisms in place, girls who have never been to school or whose schooling has been interrupted will have the opportunity to build their functional literacy and basic and post literacy /numeracy, while building assets and diversifying their income sources.

Our fervent call to action, therefore, is for state actors and all concerned about the girl child and poverty reduction should think and classify non-formal education as a key focus area.
