

NIGERIA – NGO ORAL STATEMENT TO CEDAW COMMITTEE

Thank you madam chair. My name is Favour Irabor I am speaking on behalf of the NGO Nigerian coalition made up of 191 NGOs. My colleague and I will outline some of the most pressing issues facing women in Nigeria, which have been detailed in the two shadow reports compiled by us.

1. Incorporation of CEDAW into National Law

CEDAW has not been incorporated into national law which seriously hampers its implementation. We are aware that the Nigerian government has agreed to work towards the incorporation of CEDAW by 2009 but we are concerned that the issues which prevented the bill in 2007- related to the state's positions on articles 2, 12 and 16, will again prevent its passage. We therefore, urge the government to fulfill its obligation to women and incorporate CEDAW in national law, without further delay.

2. Health

The maternal mortality rate in Nigeria is the 2nd highest in the world. The Nigerian government is not committed to addressing this major threat to women's health and life. The health issues that affect women in Nigeria are numerous in number and great in magnitude. The government should combat this by improving and delivering efficient and effective primary health care services. We recommend that in order to reduce maternal mortality these efforts should include the provision of free post / ante-natal and Emergency Obstetrics Care. Effort should be directed at the implementation of the 2004 comprehensive health sector reform. We call for a 26% allocation of the national budget to health as recommended by the WHO.¹

3. Violence against women and girls

Violence against women remains the most prevalent form of Human rights violation in Nigeria, ranging from domestic violence, harmful traditional/modern practices, sexual exploitation and rape of women and children. The Penal code continues to allow wife battering. We welcome the laws enacted by some of the states to combat certain instances of Violence against Women, and urge for effective implementation of the same. There is however an urgent need for immediate Federal action to combat Violence against Women across Nigeria, including the repeal of laws permitting wife battery and the institution of laws prohibiting marital rape, FGM and other forms of violence are not addressed by the criminal code.

4. Political Participation of Women

At the moment there is less than 5% representation of women both in elective and appointed positions within the 3 tiers of government, despite women constituting 50% of the electorate. The government has declared that they are working toward 35% political representation of women by the year 2015, which still does not provide proportionate representation for women. This declaration is clearly not backed by concrete programmes. Women's lack of access to political spaces is further compounded by the discriminatory indigeneity practices. We recommend that the government take immediate steps- including adopting special measure, to enable and strengthen women's participation in political decision making in the country.

I will now hand over to my colleague.

Thank you. My name is Elizabeth Oji and I will highlight 4 further areas of concern.

1. Education and Gender Stereotypes

Despite the Universal Basic Education Act, aimed at ensuring the right to education for all children, the girl child continues to be marginalized in the education system. The high drop-out rates for girls continues for various socio-economic reasons including: for marriage or labour. Cultural stereotypes and poverty play a large role in preventing girls from completing even their basic education. Where family resources for education are limited, it is the girls who are withdrawn from school. We call for effective system that would track and bring back children especially the girl-child, who are not enrolled in school or have dropped out. We demand a well resourced strategic plan for ensuring education for the girl-child, which is allocated an adequate percentage from the national budget.

2. Rural Women

Rural women in Nigeria suffer the highest levels of exclusion in all areas, and are affected by multiple forms of discrimination; especially in health, education and political participation. They are the poorest group in Nigeria, more affected by harmful traditional practices; including the discriminatory customary laws concerning inheritance and land ownership, especially as widows. Women own only 10% of the land in Nigeria despite undertaking 70% of the agricultural work. Land ownership is a key economic resource in rural Nigeria for it provides a means of livelihood, access to credit and is also the basis for compensation for environmental degradation. Discrimination in laws and practice related to inheritance, severely limits women's access to resources. We therefore recommend reform of customary laws and practices to ensure women's right to inheritance.

3. Employment

High levels of discriminatory practices abound in both the public and private sector. Women frequently lose their jobs on marriage or pregnancy. Even within the police force women are required to ask for permission to marry. The entrenched stereotypes in Nigeria also prevent women from gaining employment as they are seen as belonging to the domestic sphere or where they are given employment; this is often only based on their perceived status as sex objects. Sexual harassment in the work place is disturbingly frequent. The government should institute labour laws which make it a statutory requirement for all employers to have maternity/paternity and sexual harassment policies.

4. Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation

Despite the 2003 Federal law on trafficking of women and children, women and girls continue to be trafficked and sexually exploited within and outside the country. Clearly, Poverty and absence of options are central to making women vulnerable. Poverty alleviation policies and programmes are not gender sensitive and we recommend that all of these programmes should be gender mainstreamed. Domestic workers make up a large proportion of internally trafficked people, and are more likely to be victims of sexual exploitation. NAPTIP needs to give adequate attention to providing support to this vulnerable group. We also recommend that the government should ensure that NAPTIPⁱⁱ is enabled to effectively implement the anti-trafficking in person's prohibition Act 2004 and that its interventions are sensitive to gender issues especially as trafficking disproportionately affects women.

ⁱ World Health Organisation

ⁱⁱ NAPTIP – National Agency for Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons