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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 World Mission 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

During the last session of the Commission on the Status of Women, World Mission Foundation organized a side event titled “Elimination of all forms of discrimination and abuse against women and girls”. Several speakers talked about different forms of abuse and discrimination, ranging from physical to sexual abuse. There were graphic presentations on the effects of these abuses. The presentations on sexual abuse stood out from the rest, and the present statement will concentrate on that topic.

According to one of the speakers at the event, Dr. Eghobamien M. Oghomwenoyemwen of the University of Benin Teaching Hospital, Benin City, Nigeria, sexual violence is “any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed against a person’s sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work”. This definition gives a detailed meaning to violence; it tells it like it is. In other words, there are different ways in which a person can be abused sexually, and these ways are detailed in this definition, which the presenter culled from the World Health Organization *World Report on Violence and Health* (http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/2002/9241545615_eng.pdf).

World Mission Foundation has been privileged to witness first-hand testimonies of women and girls, especially in Africa, who were in so many ways abused by their spouses, employers, and even male children of their employers. They are the bedrock of this statement. Women are abused sexually in many ways and in many circumstances on a daily basis. It is not unusual for a woman who is sick and not physically fit to perform sexual acts with her husband to be forced to do so because tradition demands that she satisfy him; neither is it new for a woman to grudgingly agree to her husband’s advances even after she has been emotionally and physically battered by the same man. The worst of it is that the same woman has nobody to complain to, not even her mother, who will advise her to continue to submit to her husband because of tradition and culture. This we call a form of modern-day slavery: a woman is seen as the property of her husband; an object.

It is also abuse that, according to tradition, women who initiate sex are considered wayward. She is expected to wait for her husband to make the advances and when he does not, she is expected to just go to sleep, burning in her passion and feeling. Other forms of sexual abuse against women are the acts performed on women married off to older men before they are not physically or emotionally mature enough for sexual acts. Africa in general, and Nigeria in particular, does not educate its children, especially the female, about sex, as it is taboo to talk about such things. Girls are brought up to live chastely until they are married. In most cases, they undergo circumcision to curb them of sexual drive. However, when they are married, the men do not take into consideration that the girls are too immature for the sexual act, and also that their vagina has been made smaller by circumcision. They just use force, causing the girls much pain and harm, and will continue to do so, over and over again.

Women and girls are also targets of rape by their employers. In Africa, it is not out of place for girls and young women to be given by their parents to work as maids. Some of them are raped, either by their employers or the sons of their

employers. However, out of fear of losing their jobs, being ostracized or rejected, or even called liars, they do not speak out and continue to live in misery until some of them either take their own lives or run away, while others become commercial sex workers. In the process, some of them contract sexually transmitted diseases, which often cut short their lives.

Recently, we heard the story of a woman who was raped continuously by someone she knew very well, who invited her and some other people to attend an event. This man, a politician in Benin, was married and a trusted friend. The girl was overpowered and tied down inside the man's hotel room while he performed lewd acts on her, allegedly because she had been "chosen by some of the man's deities" as possessing the lucky charm that would guarantee his re-election. By a stroke of luck or by a miracle, she survived and is telling her story because she is informed enough to do so.

Studies have shown that most of such abuses are not reported and, therefore, not recorded. According to a study carried out by Dr. Oghomwenoyemwen, in 12 documented cases of sexual violence involving adults, the age range of the victims was 18-45, with a mean age of 24. Most of the attacks involved more than one assailant, and most of the victims did not immediately report the violation. When they did, they were found to be suffering from unhappiness, fear, anger, anxiety, depression, feelings of low self-esteem, etc. There are many more stories, which limitations of space will not permit us to present.

Following are some of our recommendations which we believe must be implemented if we are to see the end of this social vice:

- Female empowerment, including economic empowerment through skills acquisition and education, must be achieved
- States should increase public awareness of this vice and also punish offenders severely
- Victims should be adequately compensated by Governments
- States should establish centres where victims will not only receive medical treatment but also therapy and any other help they may need to return to society
- Awareness should be created and increased in order to encourage victims to speak out and report violations of any kind and by any one
- Sexual education should be introduced in schools, especially middle and senior high schools
- Schools should be made to introduce sexual educational curricula that includes talks on a quarterly basis by professionals and presentations on domestic sexual violence and how it can be identified, avoided and also reported
- Women and girls should be educated on the need to seek medical care immediately after experiencing sexual violence, and empowered to speak out immediately
- Parents and children should be educated about the rising incidence of domestic sexual violence involving relatives and adequate measures should be taken to protect children from predators