



PERMANENT MISSION OF NIGERIA TO THE UNITED NATIONS

828 SECOND AVENUE • NEW YORK, N.Y. 10017 • TEL. (212) 953-9130 • FAX (212) 697-1970

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## **STATEMENT**

BY

**MRS. SALAMATU HUSSAINI SULEIMAN**  
HONOURABLE MINISTER OF WOMEN AFFAIRS AND SOCIAL  
DEVELOPMENT OF THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF NIGERIA

AT THE

54<sup>TH</sup> SESSION OF THE COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF  
WOMEN/BEIJING+15 REVIEW CONFERENCE

NEW YORK, MARCH 3, 2010.



Chairperson,

Members of the Bureau,

Distinguished Delegates,

Let me start by congratulating the Bureau on the brilliant organisation of this 54<sup>th</sup> Session. My government also commiserates with the governments of Haiti and Chile over the recent earthquakes.

Nigeria associates herself with the statement made on behalf of the African Group and the Group of 77 and China and appreciates the opportunity provided by the 54<sup>th</sup> Session to highlight some of the efforts we have made and lessons learnt since Beijing Declaration.

Chairperson,

Over the last 15 years, Nigeria has continued to be committed to the cause and advancement of women by establishing and strengthening structures, institutions and systems to specifically address gender issues and concerns at all levels. The establishment of a Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development in 1995, to serve as the national machinery and focal point on Gender Mainstreaming and Programming in the country, was in direct response to the demands of Beijing Platform for Action.

Similar efforts were undertaken at the other levels of our Federal system, including the establishment of Ministries of Women Affairs in the 36 states and Women Development Units in 774 Local Government to ensure grassroots mobilization and programming. The National Centre for Women Development was also established as a machinery for research, development and training with hundreds of similar Centres established across the country. Currently, as a poverty alleviation stimulus, the Nigerian government is upgrading and equipping some Women Development Centres to train women in various income generating activities. Funds have also been provided under the National Economic Recovery Fund (NERFUND) to assist women Cooperatives across the country with soft loans to engage in entrepreneurial activities.

Chairperson,

A National Gender Policy and its Strategic Implementation Framework and Plan were adopted in 2006 and 2007 respectively, as policy documents to guide the country in the implementation of various national, regional and global commitments on women's development, empowerment, as well as gender equity and equality in Nigeria. These to a large extent have facilitated gender mainstreaming in public life and promoted better budgetary provisions at all levels of government.

Chairperson,

The implementation of the Millennium Development Goals in Nigeria through Debt Relief Gains Financing has resulted in remarkable gains for women. Various women economic empowerment programmes introduced by the Government have gone a long way in boosting the economic wellbeing of women. Poverty is now on the decline and the core welfare indicators show that the proportion of women living in relative poverty has been significantly reduced from 70% to 54%, as contained in Mid-Point Assessment of the MDGs in Nigeria.

I am happy to announce that, in recognition of education and training of women and the girl-child as an essential tool for achieving not just equality but sustainable development, we have used and strengthened the UBE programme to bridge the gap in the girl child enrolment and retention in schools. The UBE is a deliberate policy for granting the girl-child equal access with boys in education. The Literacy rate of 15 – 24 years old also improved from 76.2% to 80.20% within the same period. Accordingly, the Mid-Point Assessment of the Millennium Development Goals in Nigeria shows that the net enrolment ratio in primary education has increased over the years, from about 8 in every 10 eligible children in 2004 to 9 in 2007.

Chairperson,

Considerable progress has also been made in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action in the area of increased participation of women in decision-making. First, a National Action Committee on Women in Politics (NACWIP) was constituted in 2002 to press for increased participation of women in politics. Six Zonal Political Empowerment Offices were also set up in 2006, to mobilise women to take part in politics, train women politicians in communication and negotiation skills as well as in campaign strategies. We are pleased to note that there is progressive improvement in the number of women elected into political positions with every election since 1999.

While in 1999 women constituted 3.6% of the elected members of the Parliament at the three tiers of government, the number increased to 5.8% in 2003 and 8.26% in 2007. Currently, there are 6 female Deputy Governors, 9 female Senators, 26 female Members of the House of Representatives, 6 female Ministers, many female Special Advisers, Assistants and members of Boards, giving a general female participation of about 10%. This achievement though modest, is encouraging. The greatest achievement has however, been in the area of judicial appointments, where about 30% of all High Court Judges and other judicial officers are women.

With the General Elections coming in 2011, Nigerian women have already started strategizing towards greater participation. On 23rd February 2010 women political leaders met in Abuja, under the auspices of my office, to draw up a workable Agenda for an all-inclusive

National Women Political Summit in April 2010, where women, irrespective of political leaning, are expected to brainstorm together and map out strategies on how to capture more political positions at all levels of governance in the next elections. Women political leaders from around the world are expected to participate at the Summit.

Chairperson,

In the area of health, child and maternal mortality remain key challenges in Nigeria. Despite considerable effort of government to reduce these, wide disparities still exist between rural and urban centres and among the different geographical zones. Most of these treatable and preventable deaths are largely due to low maternal education and awareness, inadequate manpower, weak primary health care (PHC) system, poverty and poor household practices, among others.

My Ministry and other agencies have adopted various programmes and strategies to combat the problem, including advocacy and social mobilization at national, state and local government levels to sensitise stakeholders (governors, parliamentarians, traditional rulers, religious bodies and Civil Society Organisations, etc) on the promotion of policies and practices that would lead to reduction in maternal and child mortality. Happily enough, most states have now adopted free medical care for pregnant women and children under 5 years. Other strategies include training of traditional birth attendants, deployment of midwives to rural areas, provision of ambulances to Primary Health Care Centres to facilitate access to medical facilities and ease of referral to General Hospitals.

Violence against women is a concern everywhere. In Nigeria, we consider this to be an impediment to development. To combat violence against women, a number of policies have been formulated, including a draft Sexual Harassment Policy for Educational Institutions to prohibit sexual harassment in schools and in the work place; as well as a National Policy on the Protection and Assistance to Victims of Trafficking (2008), in addition to the National Gender Policy.

Though we faced challenges earlier in the bid to domesticate the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), we have since made considerable progress, and the bill is now before the National Assembly, our Parliament, for speedy passing into law.

In our commitment to the advancement and empowerment of women, we work closely with our National Human Rights Commission (NHRC). In recognition of the important role of human rights institutions, Nigeria lends her voice to the call for increased visibility of National Human Rights Institutions in the work of the Commission.

Chairperson,

Nigeria remains committed to all regional and international initiatives on women and participated in the 8<sup>th</sup> African Regional Conference on the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in Banjul last year, under the auspices of the Economic Commission for Africa. We are sure that the conclusions of that meeting will greatly enrich the review we are undertaking now.

Chairperson,

I would like to conclude by affirming Nigeria's continued commitment to policies and programmes targeted at the advancement and empowerment of women in all spheres of life. I want to use this forum to acknowledge and thank our development partners, the International Community and Non-Governmental Organisations, for their continued support and assistance. I also commend the ongoing efforts of the Secretary General to create a composite entity for women's issues in the UN System. This will indeed improve the global situation of women and consolidate all existing efforts.

I thank you for listening.