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Statement submitted by Friends of Africa International, 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 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/2011/100.

Statement*

Goal 2 of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) aims to achieve universal primary education. Target 2.A aims to ensure that, by 2015, boys and girls will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has noted many ways in which recent global events, such as conflicts and the financial crisis, serve as impediments to achieving Goal 2, especially for girls. In fact, the Dakar Framework for Action identified conflict as the biggest impediment towards attaining the goal of Education for All. As an organization with consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, Friends of Africa International (FAI) would like to take the opportunity to draw attention to gender disparity in school attendance that still affect girls globally, especially during and after conflicts.

The UNESCO Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2011 points out that “being female, poor and living in a country affected by conflict are three of the most pervasive risk factors for children being out of school”. Further, UNESCO estimated that about 40 per cent of primary school non-attendance globally (especially among the girl child), occurs in areas affected by conflicts. It has been observed that social and cultural limitations and traditions increase gender-based discrimination during and after conflicts. Thus, FAI believes that by directly addressing social structures that prevent girls from attending school gender-based inequalities can be overcome, especially during conflicts. Africa is the most affected region due to a large number of civil conflicts in the last decades. Since 1980, 28 States in sub-Saharan Africa have experienced war. In 2008, according to United Nations data, roughly one in four children within the region was not attending primary school.

Increased poverty, disease and malnutrition force children to work or stay at home. Schoolchildren are often conscripted or recruited as soldiers. Many girls and women become victims of sexual violence, making it unsafe to attend school. According to TransAfrica Forum, in 2005 gender parity in primary education was only achieved in 14 out of the 40 countries sampled in the sub-Saharan region. National budgets are channelled towards warfare capacity, largely ignoring education. FAI believes that the gender disparity in school attendance during and after conflicts can be handled if a gender-mainstreaming approach is used in assessing the educational needs of children.

FAI has been contributing to change this reality by implementing projects that empower young Africans, especially young women, with education and training necessary to effectively defend human rights and democracy in their communities, and by constantly underlining the importance of gender-mainstreaming in the reconstruction and the development of every society. Achieving universal primary education is fundamental to achieving peace, social stability and economic prosperity for the continent as a whole.

In practical terms, girls and women constitute an important and uniquely valuable part of the intellectual and labour force. Investing in girls’ education goes beyond economic interests since girls and women constitute roughly half of the world’s population. Educating both girls and boys will benefit humankind.

* The present statement is being issued without formal editing.