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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”**

Statement submitted by African Hope Committee, 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

As a first-time participant in the work of the Commission on the Status of Women, the African Hope Committee commends the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) for working closely with civil society to address the most pressing issues faced by women around the world, in particular in Africa. Since its inception, the Committee has vowed to be the voice of the voiceless by giving immigrants and underprivileged people in Africa an opportunity to learn how to solve their own problems. In this regard, we focus on women's empowerment, the sexual health and reproductive rights of women and girls and, more importantly, education and leadership for men, women and young people. The Committee would like these issues to be fully addressed in the post-2015 development agenda. We recognize that premarital sex, female genital mutilation, a lack of proper water and sanitation, a lack of education and economic dependency, among other things, continue to have a negative impact on women's health and rights in Africa. Our goal is therefore to see those practices and obstacles come to an end in the nearest future.

The issue of premarital sex is of great concern for Islam, a religion practised by a great number of Africans. The topic is preached about with tight, disapproving lips and those of reproductive age are rarely engaged in a constructive conversation that encourages safety. Cultural taboos prohibit young people from exploring contraception and forms of protection from sexually transmitted infections. Encouraging education on sexual health and reproductive rights for women and girls will decrease the stigma surrounding them. Such open conversations arm women and young people with the knowledge to protect themselves against sexually transmitted infections and lead to safer and healthier pregnancies when the time comes.

Female genital mutilation continues to be a heartbreaking violation of the sexual health and reproductive rights of women and girls and reinforces the place of women in societies ruled by tradition. The Committee calls upon Member States and the United Nations to stop this egregious abuse of human rights throughout Africa and to provide a secure environment in which women and girls can make choices over their reproductive health. Such action could be carried out by UN-Women, with the support of Member States, as part of the post-2015 development agenda. It is clear that living in fear of having one's womanhood brutally removed is not a life at all.

Increasing the focus on sexual health and reproductive rights encourages women to own their bodies. This includes the questions of whether to have children, when to have children and how many children to have. Instead of starting a family directly after marriage, many educated women choose to start a career or learn a trade that will give them financial freedom. If a woman does not have to support her family through financial means or as a carer, she is able to practise her trade and support herself. This independence has led to brilliant advances in the world of microfinance and even forays into entrepreneurship.

Practice has taught us that women have been incredibly successful once they have been given the resources. Small businesses, often run by women whose ideas were realized through support from an empathetic donor, can lift an entire village out of poverty. Sustainable farming is a way of the past and advances in technology have made agricultural work less taxing and friendlier towards the female sex.

The foundation of any fundamental change is education. Although there is already incredible emphasis on education, it has yet to be realized completely. Education is still frowned upon. If educated, women may choose to exercise what they have learned in a manner that would improve the state of their community. Although societies are not primarily matriarchal, women are responsible for rearing children. Educated mothers would encourage the phenomenon of education to trickle steadfastly down through future generations of women. If mothers emphasized the importance of education, this would stop women from being kept in ignorance.

Issues surrounding water and sanitation continue to be critical obstacles when it comes to girls staying in school in most African countries. We are dedicated to ensuring that, by 2030, girls in Africa will not drop out of school owing to frustrations and health issues relating to improper hygiene.

The Committee will work alongside UN-Women to ensure that African women who immigrate to the United States of America find a safe harbour. We will continue to provide sexual health and reproductive rights resources to all our clients and individuals through community outreach. In the past year, through our commitment to education, our organization hosted advocacy programmes for women and girls and a round-table forum on the specifics of immigration and reform. We pledge to be a safe place for women. We educate first and then provide services to women and young people entrenched in unfavourable situations or swindled by immigration “lawyers” who prevent them from exercising the independence that they unquestionably gained by entering the United States. Aligning our work with the sustainable development goals, we will continue to empower our African women and girls in the United States and abroad.
