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INTERACTIVE EXPERT PANEL

**Regional Perspectives in Progress Achieved and Remaining Gaps and
Challenges in the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action**

Written Statement

Submitted by

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Excellencies,
Distinguished participants,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I want to start by acknowledging the magnitude of the response by African member States to the 2 sets of questionnaires that ECA administered to capture the progress that has been made in the implementation of the Beijing Platform of Action. A total of 47 countries representing 87 per cent of the 53 member States responded to both questionnaires. This represents a 6% increase of participation from the previous 10 year assessment in BPfA review exercises. ECA views this as a demonstration of increased awareness among member States of the imperative of monitoring of progress in implementing global commitments.

The Africa review was undertaken from 16-20 November 2009, in Banjul The Gambia. The meeting was attended by over one thousand participants from government, civil society, the UN and other development agencies. Rich discussions ensued, culminating in the *Banjul Declaration*. ECA would like to thank the government of the Gambia, in particular the Vice President and Minister of Women's Affairs, Mrs Isatou Njie-Saidy for successfully hosting the Eight Regional Conference on Women, Beijing + 15

My presentation seeks to highlight major progress and challenges in the achievement of gender equality in Africa based on this review.

Africa has made impressive gains in closing gender gaps in primary *education* attributable to the institution of free, compulsory universal primary basic education across a significant number of African governments. While countries such as South Africa, Tunisia and Zambia have already attained parity at primary level, a number of countries including Cameroon, Egypt, Ghana, Madagascar, Mozambique, United Republic of Tanzania and Uganda are close to reaching parity.

With more investments needed at both secondary and tertiary levels, countries such as Cameroon, Egypt, Madagascar, South Africa, Tunisia and Uganda show promising signs of the achievement of parity at secondary level, while at tertiary, Cameroon, Egypt and Madagascar show signs of being close to parity. The status of the girl child is receiving a boost as noted with respect to progress being made in education. An estimated 65% of countries are engaged in ongoing research on the situation of girls. Some countries have also revised school curricula to reflect positive images of women. Nevertheless gaps need to be filled in the areas of girls' inheritance rights, the attainment of higher education and the elimination of cultural barriers and practices affecting their advancement.

Progress has also been noticeable in the area of women's *participation in decision-making*, due to affirmative action measures instituted by most governments. Africa celebrates major achievement in Rwanda which has become a global example of maintaining the highest number of women representation in Parliament and Liberia which witnessed the election of Africa's first woman Head of State. Some countries have female Vice-Presidents, Prime Minister, Vice-Prime Ministers and Speakers. However, much more still needs to be done to increase women's participation in decision-making at lower levels.

Although some countries in the region have been able to considerably reduce *maternal mortality*, overall progress on this Millennium Development Goal has been limited. Maternal mortality in Africa remains the highest in the world. This has been caused substantially by inequities in accessing health services due to disparities in income, rural urban location and the shortage of essential health personnel.

The fifteen-year review of the implementation of the International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action (ICPD PoA) and the Beijing Platform For Action (BPFA), note that despite commitments made to women's health, this has not translated into substantial gains and therefore calls for intensified efforts including innovative ways of addressing maternal mortality.

In the area of Violence Against Women (VAW), legal frameworks have been instituted whilst policies have been defined. A large number of countries have national plans aimed at building capacities of law enforcement agencies in addressing the issue. This has been boosted by the involvement of men and boys in VAW initiatives. Forty-seven per cent (47%) of countries have also enacted legislation to combat Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). Furthermore, numerous countries have institutions to ensure that victims of abuse receive comprehensive services. Nevertheless, VAW remains endemic across all social, economic and religious groups in Africa and laws and policies are yet to be effectively and fully enforced.

With respect to *women and armed conflict*, African countries are now more aware of UN Security Council Resolutions 1325, 1820, 1888 and 1889 and are committed to their implementation. Ten countries are now implementing the provisions of 1325, while three have national action plans. Some countries have introduced human rights, conflict prevention and resolution into university curricula, while in others, the training of police, military, medical and legal personnel are ongoing. Sensitization on these resolutions nevertheless needs to be intensified to create awareness among countries which are not in conflict to develop national plans.

While all countries demonstrate an increase in women's *economic participation* in the formal and informal economy, women continue to dominate as informal sector and non-wage actors and still lack equal access to productive resources such as land, credit and technology. Hence, *poverty* remains a challenge even though most governments have reallocated public spending in favour of programmes that are directed towards empowering women.

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I thank you for your kind attention.