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Remarks by Yvonne O'Neal on behalf of Africa Development Interchange Network to UN-Women Executive Board Meeting, 17 June 2014

Thank you, Mr. President. Africa Development Interchange Network – ADIN – is pleased to have the opportunity to be here today to amplify the voice of African women.

ADIN specializes in development, poverty alleviation and people's rights in a safe environment. We work to enhance the participation of people at the grassroots in democratic and governance processes as well as amplify their voices at global events.

In all its areas of operation, ADIN has always mainstreamed aspects relating to gender and efforts to end violence against women. We stand with UN Women in your efforts, and most especially in the priority area of intervention to ending violence against women and girls.

The prevalence of violence against women and girls worldwide is very troubling. Why does this violence exist in such high proportions, whether it is physical, sexual, psychological or otherwise? The economic toll of violence against women and girls is very high and the president of the African Development Bank Group, Donald Kaberuka, rightly stated that *“Violence against women is the most dehumanising form of discrimination and in Africa, we lose about 31% GDP out of violence against women.”*

We believe that the economic empowerment of women will help to eliminate violence against women and girls. Towards that objective, ADIN has embarked on a project in Cameroon. The vision of the project is women's economic empowerment as a means to protect them from all sorts of violence because of their vulnerability, capitalizing on rural opportunities in agriculture.

The project seeks engagement with various social groups: (1) urban women engaged in prostitution – to study and understand the root causes of their situation; (2) underemployed urban women (domestic workers) – to identify cases of abuses, enhance their overall capacity to meet the challenges and get protection; (3) rural women – to enhance their economic capacities to improve their income level and structure them in a sustainable social safety scheme; (4) human traffickers – to face justice and counseling for change in behavior; (5) Decentralized Local Authorities (Town Counsellors and Mayors) – to jointly implement innovative economic and social protection schemes for women at risk of violence; (6) microfinance institutions –to support the economic empowerment scheme; (7) lawmakers and justice service providers (barristers) – to seek their contribution to the legal protection of women against violence; (8) government institutions (Ministries of Women's Affairs and Social Affairs) – to work on women protection synergies.

The project intends to explain, help control and respond to the economic fragility of women, in a bid to providing targeted women who are at risk of violence or discrimination, with empowerment and income that in turn would ensure some level of autonomy and decision space on their living. Some expected results are: (1) More women are safe from economic vulnerability and thus

protected against violence; (2) Cases of violence against women are denounced and taken to court, hindering the activities of traffickers of women and young girls; (3) Victims of violence against women in major cities are economically empowered and resettled in safer communities; (4) Public Authorities are informed on new ways to tackle the problem and can improve relevant legal instruments.

Achieving these results will trigger change in the kind of relationship that exists between the major stakeholders considered by the project. The empowered women will hence have the ability, capacity and means to take care of their cases, by knowing who to refer to and what action to take without dependence. Public authorities will have some reference points with regard to violence against women that will inform their social development undertaking as well as concrete tools to manage in order to curb the problem. Perpetrators of violence against women will know that they can no more go unpunished and adjust in fear of being prosecuted. Justice providers will receive more denunciation and have more space to act efficiently in cases related to violence against women. Parliamentarians in particular will be better informed on the necessity to enforce suitable legal instruments to stop violence against women and influence the government more in adopting or ratifying legal tools.

The strategy overall is to parallel “Women’s Economic Empowerment” and “Ending Violence Against Women”, thus determining specific relevant correlation and design a road map to inform development public policies and initiating innovative legal, economic and social protection schemes for poor women.

Silvie Ndogmo, President of the Coordination of Central African Women’s Organizations and Networks (COREFAC) stated in a paper titled *Women’s economic empowerment as solution to violence against women in Africa*, women’s empowerment is more than just a social justice issue - it is a fundamental human right and an eloquent way to alleviate violence against women.

Indeed, when women have access to education and facilitate their full participation in the affairs and decision-making, it is a powerful way to alleviate poverty. Women with equal rights are better educated, healthier and have better access to land, jobs and financial resources. Their revenue increases household income, increasing women's control over decision-making in the household; gender equality also means better prospects for the future and well-being for children, alleviating poverty for future generations.

In several countries, agricultural and livestock yields could increase if women had easy access to land and sources of funding. Violence against women and gender equality is a key factor for a comprehensive, democratic, peaceful and sustainable development. Equality between men and women is not only crucial, but is also a fundamental human right and a question of social justice. Similarly, gender equality is one of the cornerstones of growth and poverty alleviation, and it is essential if we are to achieve the Millennium Development Goals for the short time left or have better success in the implementation and localization of the post 2015 development agenda.

Catherine Ashton said: "We know that all around the world, places where women thrive, communities also thrive. It is in everyone's interest to include women in all aspects of society, "... However, the question that haunts us is why there is so much violence against women and girls and what can be done to end it? We’d like to think that the solution lies in the hands of women: that is, women who birth and nurture sons and daughters.

We propose that there be a massive campaign for maternal health in which women are taught to value their girl child equally as their boy child. And further, help the mothers to socialize their male

and female children equally to value the worth and dignity of every human being. We believe that this socialization should begin from the cradle so that by the time a girl begins to mature she is not seen as a sexual object, but equal in worth as her male counterpart.

Then there will be no need for mothers in Cameroon and elsewhere to iron the breasts of their daughters, no need for FGM, there will be an end to child brides, and an end to constant fear of being raped by men who know no better. This calls for a major shift in thinking; but is it so revolutionary to think that we were all created equal, male and female, with no one gender having domination over the other? **We urge UN Women to consider this simple proposal.** Let us UNiTE to make gender equality the cultural norm in the future we want!

Thank you.