



BELARUS

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**UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY
INFORMAL THEMATIC DEBATE
ON THE PROMOTION OF GENDER EQUALITY
AND THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN**

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**STATEMENT
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It was many decades ago that the classic American poet Walt Whitman wrote “A man is a great thing upon the earth and through eternity; but every jot of the greatness of man is unfolded out of woman”. Men will not dispute such a statement. Nevertheless, even in the 21st century we cannot say that the sole idea of freedom and equality of women in family, society and state has found its full embodiment. We still use the phrase “gender problems” thus confirming that there still are significant difficulties in this area.

At present the equality of rights and opportunities for women and men is acknowledged by all civilised people and democratic states. The real achievement of such equality is regarded as a matter of global importance.

In Belarus there is a traditional especially caring attitude to a woman, a mother and their rights. It was not accidental that the year of 2006 was declared in Belarus the Year of the Mother and the year of 2007 – the Year of the Child.

And these are not shallow words. These initiatives are substantiated by an all-around and systematic work of the state to support a woman, a family and a child.

Belarus has been working hard on this issue for more than ten years. Since 1996 two five-year National Plans of Action on Gender Equality have been implemented.

A draft of a new National Plan of Action for another five-year period has been elaborated. Its goal is to eliminate completely any discrimination on the basis of gender in all spheres of social life.

Our strategy is focused on further improvement of the status of women in terms of employment and opening up for women the areas of activities which are traditionally considered as “men’s” – first of all those in corporate and state management.

Already today in our country women hold significant senior management positions in the President's Administration, in the Government, large company business and banking.

A third of members of the Belarusian Parliament are women. In the municipal elections this January nearly 45 percent of all elected.

Half of personnel of the judiciary bodies are women.

Nearly 9 per cent of all women of Belarus hold management positions in various sectors of economy.

Four women occupy the positions of ambassadors and represent the Republic of Belarus at the international arena.

There are more than twenty actively working women's organisations in our country. These organisations are regarded as one of the key institutions of civil society.

Belarus has achieved a lot in addressing the problem of unemployment. Today's unemployment rate stands at 1.2 per cent. And it is further decreasing.

Because of this the problem of employment for women in our country is not so acute as in some other countries of the world.

However, according to the statistical data, average salary of women in Belarus is about 80 per cent of the average salary of men. Still this rate is a little bit higher than in many developed countries of the world.

This situation is explained by high level of education of women. A quarter of women and 20 per cent of men have higher education. Women make 51 per cent of the personnel of scientific institutions.

Education, medical care, culture, trade and services are among the main areas of employment of women in Belarus. Certain disparities are inherent in the education system. For example, girls comprise 74 per cent of students in teacher training and 72 per cent in the medical sciences. On the other hand men comprise 71 per cent of those studying technologies and technical sciences and 69 per cent of those architecture and construction.

Of course, there are professions which are perceived as predominantly "men's" or "women's". It leads to uneven distribution of men and women between different types of employment. However, I would like to underline the reason for this is not some kind of sex discrimination. This situation is explained by the freedom of educational choice and the perceived public prestige of certain professions and types of activities.

The word "woman" always stands next to the word "mother". This is why a comprehensive protection of motherhood and childhood is one of the priorities of the state policy of the Republic of Belarus.

Like for many other countries of the world demographic security is a topical problem for my country today. A set of measures to solve this problem is outlined in the State Programme "Children of Belarus" and the National Programme of Demographic Security for the term 2006-2010. They include the following.

- material and financial support of families in the form of birth allowances as well as those related to care and upbringing of children, various types of material support. For the sake of reference I would like to note that today 27 per cent of children up to 18 years old are covered by the system of state allowances;
- labour, tax, living, medical and other benefits;
- social servicing of the family (provision of medical, social, psychological, training, legal services);
- protection of health of pregnant women and children;
- measures on social adaptation of orphans and special support of their parents;
- promotion in the society of a healthy life style.

Yet the pro-birth policy is not limited to the socio-economic measures.

Let us consider why women choose to give births or have just one child? Let us, dear women, address this question to ourselves. Then it becomes clear that the reason for this situation is not only material conditions. A woman is often afraid that after child birth and prolonged child care she will not be able to return to the active employment and public life.

This is why it is not less, and may be even more important to establish the conditions which provide mothers with guaranteed opportunities to fulfil themselves professionally and creatively, to make a career, combining business with motherhood.

To achieve this there is a need to establish legally labour guarantees for working mothers including the opportunities of part-time employment. It is necessary to deal with the problems of preschool education and upbringing of children through the establishment of appropriate services that could take care of children while their mothers work as well as to address some other issues.

A lot of work has been done in Belarus recent years to protect labour rights of mothers. In particular, the prohibition to terminate employment relationship with pregnant women and the women on child care leave (its duration in Belarus is three years) has been enacted in Belarus. After a resumption of work by a mother an employer is not allowed to terminate unilaterally a work contract until her child reaches the age of five.

In modern family men and women should bear equal responsibility for the upbringing of children. In this connection the Belarusian legislation is being perfected proceeding from an understanding that both parents should enjoy equal rights to social guarantees related to the childcare and upbringing of children.

Recently more and more attention is given to the protection of reproductive health. In order to bring down the maternal and infant mortality a multilevel system of medical aid is being established in the Republic of Belarus. The measures taken have resulted in decreasing the rate of infant mortality from 10 children per 1000 live births in 1990 to 7.7 – in 2003. Infant mortality rate in our country is the lowest among the CIS countries.

The maternal mortality rate (11.4 per 100,000 live births) corresponds to the level of developed countries.

The Republic of Belarus takes tough and drastic measures to fight the terrible evil of the modern world – trafficking in women and children.

Yesterday, on March 5 the International Conference “Trafficking in Women and Girls: Meeting the Challenge Together” was held in the United Nations Headquarters. The Permanent Mission of the Republic of Belarus to the United Nations was among co-organizers of this Conference.

The State Programme of Comprehensive Measures to Combat Human Trafficking and Prostitution for 2002-2007 was adopted and is currently implemented in our country.

We have authored a number of international initiatives on this issue.

There are the reasons for Belarus to be proud of the progress in addressing gender problems. Ensuring real equality of the rights of men and women, increasing the share of women on the leading posts, strengthening their role in the adoption of the managing decisions and in the life of the state and the society – is not simply an idea or a wish. This is the direction of the state policy of the Republic of Belarus.

We welcome the efforts of all countries, all international organisations and all people of good will aimed to ensure that a woman takes a proper position worthy of her on every continent and in every state.