



STATEMENT BY DR. M.S. GILL, MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT AND MEMBER OF INDIAN DELEGATION, ON AGENDA ITEM 64: ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN, AGENDA ITEM 65: IMPLEMENTATION OF THE OUTCOME OF THE FOURTH WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN AND TO THE TWENTY-THIRD SPECIAL SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY IN THE THIRD COMMITTEE OF THE 60TH SESSION OF THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY ON OCTOBER 13, 2005

Mr. Chairman

Sixty years after the Charter of the United Nations reaffirmed our collective faith in the equal rights of men and women, much has been achieved but much more clearly needs to be done. Today, there is wider recognition of the need for a fundamental equality between women and men, and to end all forms of discrimination against women, but translating this into reality remains a major challenge, particularly, for developing countries. This calls for greater empowerment of women - socially, economically and politically.

Mr. Chairman

In India, empowerment of women has consistently received all possible attention. The Prime Minister of India Dr Manmohan Singh said "no nation can stand proud if it discriminates against any of its citizens. Certainly no society can claim to be a part of the modern civilized world unless it treats its women on par with men. The time for genuine and full empowerment of our women is here and now. This is an idea whose time has truly come, but whose realisation we must all now work for". The Common Minimum Programme of the Government recognizes the political, legal, educational, and economic empowerment of women, as one of the top priorities. It also considers the empowerment of women as one of the key principles of good governance.

India has taken a number institutional and legal measures to narrow the gap between the *de jure* status and the *de facto* position of women. This includes affirmative actions to strengthen women's ability to participate at all political levels, particularly by reserving 33 per cent of local government seats for women. As a result, a million women are being elected to the village councils, at the grassroots level of our country every five years. This large-scale mobilization of women in the public life of India is an unprecedented event and it is the most important political intervention aimed at the empowerment of women anywhere in the world. A national effort is now under way to

work towards a similar reservation of seats for women in the Indian Parliament as well. Changes in the Criminal Procedure Code and the Hindu Succession Act have been effected to further empower women.

India's strategy for empowering women includes a target to reduce the female poverty ratio by 5 per cent by 2007 and by 15 per cent by 2012. The concept of Self Help Women Groups in India has made a significant impact on economic empowerment of rural women. Nearly 10 million rural families have benefited from such a people-centred initiative.

Mr. Chairman

The report of the Secretary-General on the issue of promoting the achievement of the goal of gender equality is encouraging. India has already initiated gender responsive legislations. The Joint Parliamentary Committee on Empowerment of Women supports passage of specific gender equality legislations. It also monitors the application of gender equality principles in all legislations. Gender analysis of budgets, gender audits and gender-sensitive monitoring has been initiated at the national level. The National Policy for the Empowerment of Women seeks to mainstream a gender perspective in all laws, policies and programmes of the Government. Gender-sensitization training programmes have been held for law enforcement agencies, medical officers and census enumerators.

We welcome the Report of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Women, and the recommendations contained therein to combat violence against women. The issue of violence against women needs to be addressed with urgency. This global evil respects no geographical boundaries; it does not derive from any global pattern or tradition and is found in all countries. In this regard, mention may be made of the importance given to this issue in India. The Indian Parliament passed an Act on "The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence" earlier in the year. A Bill conferring upon women the right to protection against sexual harassment is currently under consideration.

Trafficking in women and girls is a global phenomenon with trans-national implications. National efforts alone to eliminate trafficking cannot be sufficient. It is critical to have greater cohesion in the international community's efforts in addressing the issue. Institutional arrangements at the bilateral, regional and international levels have become indispensable. The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation(SAARC) has a Convention on Trafficking. The Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children of the UN Convention against Transnational Organised Crime is of significance. The National Human Rights Commission of India, together with the relevant national agencies and multilateral bodies, is playing an important role to tackle this issue. Twenty-one of India's states have appointed focal points to ensure attention to trafficking, as part of the human rights agenda.

Mr. Chairman

There is a clearer consciousness and acceptance of the need to work towards achieving the goals and targets of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. India intends to develop indicators to measure implementation of the Convention and the Platform for Action. The Outcome Document adopted by the UNGA Session on 'Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women' and the initiatives to implement the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action, have been unreservedly endorsed by India for appropriate follow up.

We welcome the report of the Secretary-General on the Future Operation of the International Research and Training Institute for Advancement of Women (INSTRAW). The INSTRAW has undertaken a number of new areas of work including migration and remittances as also the review and appraisal of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. The responsibility for its unhindered functioning, by way of improved financial support, rests with the Member States.

Thank you Mr. Chairman

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