



STATEMENT BY H.E. DR [MRS] SYEDA HAMEED, MEMBER, PLANNING
COMMISSION, GOVERNMENT OF INDIA, AT THE 50TH SESSION OF
COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN ON MARCH 01, 2006

Madam Chairperson,

My delegation extends to you its felicitations on your election as Chairperson of this significant session of the Commission on the Status on Women.

We associate ourselves with the statement made by the distinguished representative of South Africa in his capacity as Chair of the Group of 77.

Madam Chair,

Sixty years since 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. During the last six decades, the Commission on Status of Women has played an important role in advocating gender equality and empowerment of women across the globe, apart from serving as an effective forum for exchange of national experiences and good practices on these issues. This session of the Commission is of particular significance as we take stock of the progress made in achieving goals, commitments undertaken and challenges encountered in the implementation of various global commitments.

In India, gender equality and empowerment of women has consistently received careful attention. The Prime Minister of India Dr Manmohan Singh said, " 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 for whose realisation we must all work and now".

Gender equality was conceived of in India much before the Beijing Platform for Action by providing for it in the Constitution. Our Constitution has not only granted equality to women but has also empowered the State to institute measures to attain such equality. India's Five Year Plans are committed to enable women to be "equal partners and participants in development". In 1975 the first Status of Women in India Report was presented before the world called "Towards Equality". A separate Department for Women and Child Development created in 1985, has now been upgraded to a Ministry reflecting our commitment to improve the status of women and children.

Notable initiatives undertaken in India for social, economic and political empowerment of women include reserving one-third seats for women in the urban and local self-government, which 12 years ago got 1 million grassroots women into political decision making. Further, we have enabled formation of self-help groups of women and their consolidation into confederations. We have also reduced gender gap in literacy. For gender mainstreaming we are going beyond Women's Component Plan towards gendering all facets and aspects of the 11 Five Year Plan. Yesterday our Budget was tabled in Parliament which has reflected this trend.

Now, I would like to mention briefly various steps taken recently in India towards improving the conditions of women and children and placing women and children on the path to healthy fulfilled life.

Yesterday, we have heard from Ms. Rachel N. Mayanja, Assistant Secretary-General and UN Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women about violence against women. She urged Member States to strengthen or enact legislation, including provisions for the prosecution of perpetrators; incorporate the issue of violence against women in national action plans for promotion of gender equality and undertake awareness-raising and information dissemination campaigns. I am glad to mention that the Indian Parliament passed an important legislation in 2005 to provide immediate and emergency relief to women in situations of domestic violence. The Act provides for free legal service, protects the rights of women to secure housing and includes a provision to prevent the abuser from causing further violence. It also involves NGOs as service providers for giving assistance to the abused. To provide safe conditions for women in the work place we have had a Supreme Court Judgement for 10 years. We are now working on a bill for Prevention of Sexual Harassment at their Work Place (SHAW).

The Hindu Succession Act has been amended to give daughters and widows equal right in ancestral property including agricultural land. The National Rural Employment Guarantee programme, as envisaged in the Common Minimum Programme of my country was launched in 2006. It makes the right to work a fundamental right by providing 100 days assured wage employment annually to every rural household. At least one-third of the beneficiaries of this programme would be women.

The number of women entrepreneurs in India is growing - from a meager 2% in 1971 to around 10% now. The proportion of women in the IT industry constitutes about 20% of total IT work force. To widen the base of women entrepreneurs, incentive schemes have been formulated like constitution of a standing committee on women entrepreneurs, setting up of Women Development Corporations, etc. Financial institutions and banks have also evolved special schemes for extending assistance to women entrepreneurs.

The recently set up National Commission on Farmers has looked into the requirements and status of rural women, as a majority of them derive their livelihood from agriculture. A number of new initiatives have been considered by this body to increase women's access to land, strengthen their land security by improving land records and to provide them with technical, financial and management support. A National Commission for Protection of Child Rights Act has been passed to ensure proper enforcement of children's rights and effective implementation of laws and programmes relating to children. A National Children's Commission is on the anvil.

Another major initiative to advance gender equality is the institutionalization of gender-sensitive budgeting. Gender budgets have now become an integral part of the budget exercise. India has already initiated that legislations be gender responsive. The Joint Parliamentary Committee on Empowerment of Women supports passage of specific gender equality legislations, apart from monitoring the application of gender equality principles in all legislations.

In all our endeavours we have worked shoulder to shoulder with Civil Society Organisation, NGO, both men and women, whose cooperation has been invaluable in fructifying our effort.

While a number of steps are being initiated to reduce the gender gap and improve the status of women, we are conscious of the need to do a lot more to fulfill the commitments made in the Beijing Platform for Action and at the 23rd special session of the General Assembly.

Madam Chair,

Gender mainstreaming and pursuit of a rights-based approach have contributed substantially to the progress made towards achieving 'gender equality'. Available studies show, however, that gender equality has been an ephemeral dream where resources are scarce, such as in parts of South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. As we all know, there are no quick-fix solutions or ready-made answers, or a 'one size fits all' approach.

It is imperative that the international community recognise this co-relation and take measures, including through enhanced cooperation and provision of necessary resources, so that commitments undertaken in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and at the 23rd special session of the General Assembly can be realised by all member States.

Thank You.

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