



STATEMENT BY HON'BLE MS. MABEL REBELLO, MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT AND
MEMBER OF THE INDIAN DELEGATION ON AGENDIA ITEM 61 [A]
ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN AND [B] IMPLEMENTATION OF THE OUTCOME OF
THE FOURTH WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN AND OF THE TWEYT-THIRD
SPECIAL SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY AT THE THIRD COMMITTEE OF
THE 61ST SESSION OF THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY ON OCTOBER 10, 2006

Mr. Chairman,

We thank the Secretary-General for his reports on Agenda Item 61 on the Advancement of Women and the Implementation of the Outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women and of the Special Session of the General Assembly. My delegation associates itself with the statement made under these agenda items by the distinguished representative of South Africa as Chairman of the Group of 77.

Mr. Chairman,

The universally recognised need for a fundamental equality between women and men and for ending all forms of discrimination against women has not yet been translated into reality. It remains a major challenge the world over. Greater empowerment of women - socially, economically and politically - has become more urgent than before. We support the UN Secretary-General's call for intensifying our efforts towards greater integration of gender perspectives in the implementation of and follow-up of major international conferences as well as in the context of the UN reform.

The conclusions of the UNSG contained in the Report on 'Improvement of the status of women in the UN system' points to lack of progress , even regression, in achieving 50/50 gender distribution, especially at senior and policy-making levels in the UN. The UN organisation should have taken a lead role not merely in advocacy but also in implementing the goal of 50/50 gender distribution. We hope suitable measures would be taken within the UN to address this imbalance.

In India, gender equality and the empowerment of women has consistently received careful attention. As Prime Minister of India Dr. Manmohan Singh has noted "India's quest for freedom, dignity and self respect for all our citizens can never become a living reality unless our women are equal partners in all processes of development and governance. We are committed to making that happen and I assure you that we will work earnestly to realise this dream which was very dear to the founding fathers of our Republic and it is now our national commitment in the Common Minimum Programme." 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.

Gender equality was conceived of in India much before the Beijing Platform for Action, by providing for it in the Constitution. The Constitution of India 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 enabling women to be "equal partners and participants in development". A separate Department for Women and Child Development, created in 1985, has been upgraded to a full-fledged Ministry.

A major initiative undertaken twelve years ago in India for the social, economic and political empowerment of women was the reserving of one-third of seats for women in the urban and local self-government. As a result, one million women at the grassroots level were brought into political decision-making. A national effort is under way to work towards a similar reservation of seats for women in the Indian Parliament as well. Further, we have enabled the formation of self-help groups of women and their consolidation into confederations. The concept of Self-Help Women Groups in India has made a significant impact on the economic empowerment of rural women and has benefited nearly 10 million rural families. We have also reduced the gender gap in literacy. For gender mainstreaming, we are going beyond the Women's Component Plan towards gendering all facets and aspects of the 11th Five Year Plan. 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 Study of the Secretary-General on Violence against Women released last week, and the recommendations contained therein to combat violence against women, deserves special mention. Violence against women is a global evil that respects no geographical boundaries; it does not derive from any global pattern or tradition and is found in all countries. This issue needs to be addressed urgently. In this regard, mention may be made of the considerable emphasis given by India to this issue. The Indian Parliament passed an important legislation titled 'The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act' in 2005 so as 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 abused women. To provide safe conditions for women in the work place we have a decade old Supreme Court Judgement. A bill for Prevention of Sexual Harassment of Women at their work place is under consideration in the Indian Parliament.

Another notable initiative undertaken in India is the National Rural Employment Guarantee programme 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 has risen from a meagre 2% in 1971 to around 11% at present. The proportion of women in the IT industry constitutes about 20% of total IT work force. To widen the base of women entrepreneurs, new schemes have been formulated, like the setting up of a standing committee on women entrepreneurs, of Women Development Corporations, etc. Financial institutions and banks have also evolved special schemes for extending assistance to women entrepreneurs in India, and also a proposal to earmark 5% of the credit to women is under active consideration.

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. The Joint Parliamentary Committee on Empowerment of Women works to ensure that legislation is gender responsive, supports the passage of specific gender equality legislation, apart from monitoring the application of gender equality principles in all legislation.

In all our endeavours we have worked closely with civil society organisation, including NGOs, whose cooperation has been invaluable.

Mr. Chairman,

In conclusion, I would like to point out that in response to the UN Secretary-General's call for increased representation of female personnel in UN Peace Keeping, India has been contributing lady military and police officers to a number of UN field Missions. India is particularly honoured to be sending the first ever Female Formed Police Unit, which will later this year be joining the UN Mission in Liberia (UNIMIL). This participation by India also reflects our commitment to assist the UN in more effectively reaching out to vulnerable sections particularly women and children, in conflict and post-conflict societies.

Thank You. Mr. Chairman

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