



STATEMENT BY MS. MANJULA KRISHNAN, ECONOMIC ADVISER. MINISTRY OF WOMEN & CHILD DEVELOPMENT, GOVERNMENT OF INDIA AND LEADER OF THE INDIAN DELEGATION, AT THE 51ST SESSION OF COMMISSION OF THE STATUS OF WOMEN ON MARCH 01, 2007

Madam Chairperson,

We thank the Secretary-General for his two reports related to the priority theme of the current session of the Commission viz. 'Elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child'. We also thank the Deputy-Secretary-General for her introductory statement. My delegation would assure you of its full cooperation in the work of the Commission. We associate ourselves with the statement made by Pakistan as Chair of the Group of 77.

Madam Chair,

The universally recognized need for ending all forms of discrimination against women and girls has not yet been translated into reality. The need for prevention and protection of girls from discrimination and violence, given their specific vulnerabilities, is far greater than ever before. Persistent invisibility of the girl child in critical policy and programming contexts need to be addressed. We hope that the discussions during this Session would eventually pave the way for development of normative and policy frameworks for the promotion and protection of the girl child. Our collective efforts should also focus on strengthening existing frameworks emanating from the World Summit for Children, Fourth World Summit for Women, the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols.

We support the UN Secretary General's call for addressing the continued violation of the rights of the girl child and their detrimental impact on the society as a whole, and in particular to address inequalities in the area of education, health and social protection. The international community while addressing the vulnerabilities of the girl child should advocate protection measures and also welfare and development of the girl child characterized by four E's- equality, education, enabling environment and empowerment.

Madam Chair,

India is home to the largest child population in the world. We share a deep concern about the status and welfare of children including girls, who comprise 41% of the country's population. The Prime Minister of India Dr. Manmohan Singh has said "We have a dream of an India in which every woman can feel safe, secure and empowered. Where our mothers, sisters and daughters are assured a life of dignity and personal security. We must eliminate gender disparities. We must see that every young girl is educated and skilled and capable of guiding a new generation".

To affirm its commitment to growth and development of children, India ratified the Convention of the Rights of the Child and both of its Optional Protocols. The planning process in the country emphasizes the need for welfare, development and protection of the girl child. The Tenth Plan (2002-07) re-affirmed the life-cycle approach for betterment of the girl child with focus on improvements in sex-ratio, education, nutrition, health, elimination of violence and discrimination against girl child. The existing programmes and schemes towards this end were strengthened as well as new and innovative measures introduced. Through the National Common Minimum Programme, the government is fully committed to protect the rights of children and extend special care and nutritional support to the girl child.

Madam Chair,

One of the notable initiatives taken by India towards protection of children including the girl child has been the establishment of a National Commission for Protection of Child Rights in 2006 for proper enforcement of children's rights and effective implementation of laws and programmes relating to children. To effectively eliminate social evils such as child marriage, India repealed the Child Marriage Restraint Act of 1929 and enacted a new Prohibition of Child Marriage Act to provide relief to the victims of child marriage and to enhance punishments for the offenders. This Act came into effect from January 2007.

To address survival of the girl child, India enacted the Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of Sex Selection) Act in 1994, which not only banned the misuse of ultrasound and other medical techniques but also condemned sex determination as a criminal offence. A major campaign has been launched for effective implementation of this Act throughout the country. A new scheme called '*Palna*' [Cradle Baby] is being launched in the country to benefit the girl child. An Integrated Program for Child Protection which covers all child protection programs under one umbrella with district level protection mechanisms would be launched soon. An innovative scheme to change

behavioural patterns towards the girl child is on the anvil whereby cash transfers to families will be given, on fulfillment of conditions ensuring survival, immunization, education and delay in her marriage up to 18 years. Child Help Lines have also been set up to enable prompt attention to children in distress. In all our endeavours we have worked shoulder to shoulder with Civil Society Organisations, NGOs, both men and women, whose cooperation has been invaluable in fructifying our efforts.

The study on violence against children by Prof. Paulo Sergio Pinherio, the Independent Expert of the UNSG, proposed concrete recommendations to prevent and respond to this issue. We agree entirely with his central message that no violence against children can be justified, and all violence against children can and must be prevented. From October 2006 a ban on employment of children under-14 years as domestic help or at eateries came into force in India under the Child Labour (Prohibition & Regulation) Act. This measure is part of India's commitment to eliminate child labour in all its forms. We had banned in 1985 employment of children below the age of fourteen years in factories, mines and hazardous environments. We believe that the strategy to eliminate child labour in all its forms recognizes that it is inextricably linked with poverty and illiteracy, and cannot be solved by legislation alone, and that a holistic, multi-pronged and concerted effort is needed. India is running a National Child Labour Project Scheme in 250 child labour endemic districts of the country. This is the largest worldwide programme for withdrawal of child labour from the economic activities and their rehabilitation through special courses.

The Hindu Succession Act has been amended in 2005 to delete gender discriminatory clause to enable daughters and widows equal right in ancestral property including agricultural land. 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. The Immoral (Traffic) Prevention Act is also being amended proposing more stringent punishments for traffickers.

As part of the drive to achieve complete enrolment in elementary education, the government has resolved to increase public spending on education to at least 6% of the GDP with at least half of this amount earmarked for primary and secondary education sectors. Moreover, elementary education is now a Fundamental Right in India. The *Sarva Siksha Abhiyan*, i.e. Universal Elementary Education Scheme, has been expanded covering the entire country. This programme has a special emphasis for girls. Gross Enrolment Ratio in Primary Education for Girls has increased from 64% in 1980-81 to 95.6% in

2003-04. The expanded Integrated Child Development Services [ICDS] Programme for achieving major national nutrition, health and pre-school education goals, now covers over 41 million beneficiaries, comprising over 34 million children in the 0-6 years age group and over 7 million pregnant and lactating mothers. This programme has now emerged as a unique and perhaps the largest early childhood development programme in the world. The National Rural Health Mission also supplements health needs of rural women and girls.

While numerous measures are being implemented in India to improve the lot of children, particularly the girl child, we are also conscious of the need to do a lot more to improve the overall status of the Indian child, particularly the girl child. In this process, Gender Budgeting and Gender Mainstreaming are also being effectively implemented in the country. We would continue our efforts for the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child, which is a prerequisite for gender equality and the empowerment of women.

Thank you, Madam Chairperson.

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