



STATEMENT BY MR. NIRUPAM SEN, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE, ON FINANCING FOR GENDER EQUALITY AND THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN AT THE 52<sup>ND</sup> SESSION OF COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN ON MARCH 03, 2008

Mr. Chairman,

I would like to convey our warmest felicitations to you and other members of the Bureau on your election, and to assure you of our full cooperation in the work of this Commission. We thank the Secretary-General for his report related to the priority theme viz. "Financing for gender equality and the empowerment of women". My delegation associates itself with the statement made by the distinguished representative of Antigua and Barbuda, on behalf of the G 77.

The achievement of Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 3 viz. Gender equality and empowerment of women, would largely depend on our collective efforts in timely allocation of necessary financial resources. This session of the Commission would be important not only for sharing best practices on mechanisms and processes involved in financing for gender equality, but also in giving meaningful direction in mobilizing and effective utilization of financial resources at national, regional and international levels. The UN Secretary-General in his report notes that the global commitments on gender equality have not yet been implemented, and also adequate resources have not yet been allocated.

The UN Member States have individually as well as collectively made commitments on financing for gender equality and women's empowerment at the Fourth World Conferences on Women in Beijing in 1995, and also at the International Conference on Financing for Development in 2002. While primary responsibility for allocation of finances rests with the country concerned, it has been recognized that the international community should match up to its commitment by provision of new and additional financial resources, transfer of technology, sharing of experiences, expertise, information and data, technical cooperation and capacity-building.

The Expert Group meeting held in September 2007 pointed to the shortages in ODA flows, and the concomitant negative impact on financing gender by developing countries, particularly the Least Developed countries. The twin challenges of decreasing ODA levels to developing countries as well as devising mechanisms to bridge the gap between policy and practice at the national level on financing gender, should be addressed at this Commission. This year provides yet another opportunity to integrate gender perspectives in the Follow-up to the International Conference on Financing for Development to review implementation of the Monterrey Consensus.

Mr. Chairman,

Gender equity and equality has been a key guiding principle of the Common Minimum Programme of the Government of India. India's planning process is fully committed to enabling women to be equal partners in development. A separate Department for Women and Child Development, created in 1985, was upgraded to a Central Ministry in 2005. The Joint Parliamentary Committee of the Indian Parliament on Empowerment of Women plays a crucial role in monitoring the application of gender equality principles in all legislation and also to ensure that legislation in India is gender-responsive. The reservation in India twelve years ago of one-third of urban and local self-government seats for women marked a turning point in our effort to empower women. As a result, over one million Indian women at the grassroots level have been brought into political decision-making, which effectively gives them a significant say in utilization of financial resources allocated to the local-self governing bodies in rural and urban areas. A similar reservation of seats for women in the Indian Parliament remains under consideration.

We are guided by the knowledge that economic growth does not automatically reduce gender inequality on which separate public action is also needed including for ensuring more rapid social change; women's empowerment impacts positively on the lives of men and of children (female education reduces child mortality rates); women are agents of social justice and social change and without their full emancipation there is no social progress.

Mr. Chairman,

India undertook a gradual shift in policies particularly since the Seventh Five Year Plan (1985-90) to provide explicit attention to allocation of programmes as well as schemes that directly benefited women. Starting in 1980s with the concept of beneficiary-oriented schemes for women, India in 1990s moved towards policies that highlighted gender perspective and the need to ensure a definite flow of funds from the general developmental sectors to women. This was followed by the Women's Component Plan as one of the major strategies envisaging that at least 30 per cent of the funds/benefits were earmarked in all women's related sectors. The National Policy for Empowerment of Women in 2001 further envisaged introduction of a gender perspective in the budgeting process as an operational strategy.

India adopted in 2004 'Budgeting for gender equity' as a goal. As a result, gender budgets have become an integral part of the budget exercise in India. In the Union Budget for 2008-09 presented a few days back, the Indian Finance Minister has acknowledged that gender budgeting has gained wider acceptance and credibility, and noted that 4 more gender budgeting cells have been set up in Indian Ministries/Departments increasing the total to 54.

The total magnitude of gender budget has increased from 3.8% to 5% of the total Union Government expenditure during the last four years, covering demands for grants from 27 Ministries/Departments. We are now going beyond the Women's Component Plan towards gendering all facets and aspects of the 11<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan (2007-12), apart from continued strict adherence to gender budgeting across the board.

To improve the financial independence of women, particularly in rural areas, a number of schemes have been launched with women as the primary beneficiaries. A National Rural Employment Guarantee programme launched in 2006, providing 100 days assured wage employment annually to every rural household, includes at least one-third women beneficiaries. The Government actively encourages and supports group initiatives in formation of women's self-help groups. At present, there are more than 2 million women self-help groups in the country supporting more than 10 million rural families. The Unorganised Sector Workers Social Security Bill 2007 has been introduced in the Upper House of the Indian Parliament to provide legislative backing to all social security schemes, particularly those for women workers. Recent measures taken to improve social protection include launch of the National Health Insurance Scheme for all families below the poverty line, which would benefit 300 million persons.

To enhance women's employability in high-end vocations, strong emphasis is being laid on skill building through exclusive institutes of vocational training. New schemes are being implemented to widen the base of women entrepreneurs, including special schemes promoted by financial institutions/banks. As a result, the number of women entrepreneurs in India has risen very considerably. 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 the 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 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.

Mr. Chairman,

India stands ready to work with the international community for the early realization of the Millennium Developmental Goals through effective implementation of gender empowerment and gender mainstreaming both within and outside the UN.

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