



Malaysia

Permanent Mission to the United Nations

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**STATEMENT BY
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COUNSELLOR, PERMANENT MISSION OF MALAYSIA
TO THE UNITED NATIONS
ON
AGENDA ITEM 28: ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN
OF THE THIRD COMMITTEE
OF THE 65TH SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY
NEW YORK, 11 OCTOBER 2010**

Chairperson,

This year of 2010 holds great significance in our efforts in gender equality and the empowerment of women. Earlier this year, at the 54th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women, we commemorated the 15th Anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. On 2 July, the General Assembly adopted its resolution on system-wide coherence which established the new United Nations Entity on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, to be known as UN Women. On that same date, the Economic and Social Council adopted its Ministerial Declaration for the 2010 High-level Segment on implementation of the internationally agreed goals and commitments on gender equality and the empowerment of women. Additionally, The High-level Plenary Meeting on the Millennium Development Goals in September provided an opportunity to commit to the actions needed to meet the goals by 2015, including the gender-related goals, and we will be commemorating this month the 10th Anniversary of Security Council 1325 on women, peace and security.

2. What this year has revealed, in the various discussions that have taken place, is that challenges and obstacles to implementation of the goals and commitments related gender equality and the empowerment of women remain and more needs to be done. The international community recognises this need. At the CSW for example, it was agreed that in the twelve critical areas outlined in the Beijing Declaration and its Platform for Action, and its follow-up outcomes, despite progress, barriers persist that undermine the full realisation of the Platform.

3. Yet what makes this year different than the past is that conceptually the international community as a whole – its governments and societies, and not only those working on women's issues – has built better awareness of how important it is to invest in women. No longer are women's issues isolated from the rest of government policy and programmes but is recognised as an essential and integral part. As an example, the Millennium Development Goals provided for the cross-cutting conceptualisation of issues related to women and girls to issues on the development agenda – so much to that it is recognized that gender equality is not only a goal in itself, but also a means towards achieving all the other internationally agreed development goals, including the MDGs.

4. At the ECOSOC this year, over which Malaysia presided, the ECOSOC sent a clear message that gender equality and empowerment of women are at the core of development and that neglecting these will have serious implications for all our development priorities. ECOSOC'S 2010 Ministerial Declaration was conceived as, and achieved to be, an action-oriented text which focused on a call for implementation, and not a renegotiation of issues that

would have inevitably blossomed into a 'Christmas tree', so-to-speak, of various micro-level recommendations common in documents of the United Nations. In this Ministerial Declaration, there was recognition that getting countries to implement what they have already agreed upon does not necessarily benefit from additional or reworded recommendations. In the context of gender equality and the empowerment of women, and in the context of the significance of the year of 2010 on this issue, it was agreed that concrete action would be better served with a strong Ministerial Declaration recognising and reaffirming what is there already, and moving onto the ongoing and new challenges that require addressing.

Chairperson,

5. Malaysia welcomes the establishment of UN Women, and the appointment of Ms. Michelle Bachelet to lead this new entity. We pledge our full support to the operationalization of this entity, and we are confident that the entity will strengthen the ability of the United Nations to support the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women worldwide. For our part, through the ECOSOC, we are working with member states on the process leading up to, and method of election for the Executive Board of UN Women, and it is our intention that these elections will take place soon.

Chairperson,

6. Allow me to share some information on Malaysia's efforts in realizing gender equality and the empowerment of women:

6.1 On education and training – 97% of girls are enrolled in primary education, the female literacy rate in 2008 was 89.5%, and female enrolment in higher learning institutions is 61 per cent;

6.2 On women and health – The female life expectancy was 76.4 years in 2008 and the maternal mortality rate is 0.3 per 1,000 live births. To promote early detection of breast cancer, a subsidy for mammogram screening was introduced in 2007;

As with all countries, we too see a feminization of HIV/AIDS. In addressing the epidemic, special focus has been given to reducing HIV vulnerability among women, young people and children. Under the National Strategic Plan on HIV/AIDS (2006-2010), women found to be HIV-positive are provided with post-test counseling and free anti-retroviral treatment. A special task force was established under the Department of Women's Development to address the feminization of the HIV. As part of the synergised efforts between the Government and the NGO, financial assistance is provided to NGOs which provide support services such as drop-in, outreach and counseling as well as providing information to victims of HIV/AIDS, sex workers and transvestites;

6.3 On women and poverty – a microcredit scheme, entitled, *Amanah ikhtiar Malaysia*, has been used since 1987. An impact study showed that borrowers enjoyed an average increase in monthly household income of 593 per cent in 2005. Four critical success factors contribute to the success of this scheme i.e. the usage of a cost effective eligibility test to ensure the loans are disbursed to the right and deserving beneficiaries of the scheme; borrowing procedures are designed in such a way that they are very convenient to the borrowers; rules and regulations for borrowing are easily understood by the borrowers; and a "peer pressure" method is applied on the borrowers which effectively reduces the non-performance of the borrowers;

6.4 On violence against women – The Government of Malaysia recognizes that violence against women is a serious issue that has multi-dimensional causes, including the unequal power balance or relationship between sexes. We

undertake a zero tolerance policy towards it and we undertake a holistic approach to this matter that includes removing impunity and prosecuting those who commit violence, as well as protecting and rehabilitating victims

The Malaysian Penal Code was amended in 2006 to include penalties for husbands who subject their wives to unwanted sex. A husband who forces his wife to have unwanted sex with him can now face up to five years in jail. Our Domestic Violence Act 1994 includes marital rape as form of domestic violence, and the Act is being reviewed to enhance its effectiveness, including criminalising emotional violence. In addition to this, the Anti-Trafficking-in-Persons Act was enacted in 2007, and was recently amended by Parliament on 3 August 2010, to, among others, widen the scope of the Act by introducing a new section entitled 'Smuggling of Migrants';

- 6.5 On women and the economy - in 2008, the female labour force participation rate was 45.7 per cent with 3.95 million women in the labour market, which made up for 36.0 per cent of the total labour force. To increase the participation of women in the labour force, launching grants for setting up a child care centre at the workplace in the public sector was increased. In addition, a subsidy for child care costs is also provided to those who earn below a specified monthly household income.

Various training programmes and financial assistance schemes are also implemented by various agencies to facilitate more women to become entrepreneurs. In addition, the Government includes the development of 4,000 women entrepreneurs by 2012 as one of its key performance indicators;

- 6.6 On women in power and decision-making – In addressing the issue of under-representation of women at the decision-making level, the policy of at least 30 per cent participation of women in decision-making positions at all levels was adopted by the Government on 4 August 2004. There has been positive development in achieving this policy as the percentage of women in top management positions in the public sector has increased from 18.8 per cent in 2004 to 24.8 per cent in June 2010. Despite this, the numbers of women in decision-making positions in politics and the private sector, remain comparatively low. To enhance the participation on women in decision-making in the private and legislative sectors a plan of action is expected to be submitted to the Government for approval this year;

- 6.7 On institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women – the National Council for Women and Family Development was established at the state and parliamentary constituency levels to provide the link with the grassroots in 2002. Gender Focal Points (GFPs) in government ministries and agencies was established in 2005;

- 6.8 On the human rights of women – In 2001, the Federal Constitution was amended to include the word 'gender' as one of the prohibited grounds for discrimination. Following the amendment, various laws were amended to ensure consistency. Reviews are ongoing of other laws and other relevant articles deemed discriminatory against gender in the Federal Constitution.

On 19 July 2010, Malaysia withdrew reservations to Articles 5(a), 7(b) and 16(2) to CEDAW, and the Government will continue to study the possibility to withdraw our remaining reservations;

7. Despite our progress, gaps and challenges remain. These include the impact of the economic crisis, the increasing feminization of HIV/AIDS, violence against women and continuing gender stereotypes and attitudes which create institutional and societal barriers to mainstreaming a gender perspective in implementation of policies and programmes. Additionally, continued monitoring and analysis of progress is needed. For example, in a knowledge-based economy, science, technology and vocational skills provide an advantage, but many women and girls continue to display an inclination for the arts and soft sciences, which can lessen opportunities and career advancement.

Chairperson,

8. Malaysia recognizes that civil society, including non-governmental organisations (NGOs), play an important role in complementing the efforts of the Government for the benefit of women, and funding for NGOs is provided within our national budget to implement activities and programmes for the advancement of women.

Chairperson,

9. The Government of Malaysia will continue to enhance efforts to further improve the status of women to enable them to reach their full potential and contribute towards the social and economic development of the country. Hence, gender mainstreaming will be given emphasis and gender considerations included in the formulation of policies and programmes.

Thank you.