

STATEMENT BY MR. ARJUN CHARAN SETHI, MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT AND MEMBER OF THE INDIAN DELEGATION, ON AGENDA ITEM 56 [A] ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN AND [B] IMPLEMENTATION OF THE OUTCOME OF THE FOURTH WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN AND OF THE TWENTY-THIRD SPECIAL SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY AT THE THIRD COMMITTEE OF THE 63RD SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY ON OCTOBER 14, 2008



Mr. Chairman,

We thank the UN Secretary-General for his reports on the present Agenda Item on Advancement of Women. My delegation associates itself with the statement made by Antigua and Barbuda as the Chair of G-77.

Mr. Chairman,

Advancement, development and empowerment of women and eliminating all forms of discrimination against women have been much talked about issues at the international level, however, without appreciable progress in most of the countries. It remains as an important cross cutting issue in the international social, economic and development agenda. Several international Conferences on it have been held till date, the last significant one being the United Nations Fourth World Conference on

Women in Beijing in 1995 and the Twenty third Special Session of the General Assembly in June 2000. The 2000 Millennium Summit also gave importance to the issue of equality and empowerment of women and identified attainable goals by 2015. In fact, gender is an overarching theme in all the 8 Millennium Development Goals and the main theme of MDG-3, i.e. promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women. The last review of the MDG, which was done this year, unfortunately revealed that despite progress, gender gaps remains considerable and the full potential of women is untapped. The resource crunch at the international level and lack of sincere efforts at domestic level are major hindrances in achieving this goal.

Mr. Chairman,

The UN Secretary General's report titled, "the improvement of the status of women in the United Nations system", which studied the status of women with the target of achieving 50/50 gender distribution in the UN system, especially at senior and policy-making levels in the UN has revealed a dismal state of affairs. It showed that the average increase of women in UN system was around 0.3 % in the last 10 years, with the percentage of women increasing from 34.6 % to 38.2%. If one has difficulties in implementing a relatively simple objective of equal representation of women in a cosmopolitan setup like the United Nations, it is not surprising that states with their own cultural and societal compulsions, might take much longer to achieve this objective. However, we would like to acknowledge the efforts made by the Secretary General personally in ensuring that the percentage of women in the UN system improves, and would like to convey our support to the various recommendations in his report for achieving the same.

Mr. Chairman,

Since adoption of its Constitution, India has been taking all steps possible to achieve realization of equality of women in all walks of life. Empowering women politically, educationally, economically and legally has been a major objective of the Government of India. The Department dealing with women affairs since 1985 was made into a full-fledged Ministry in India in 2005. Convinced, that lack of funds should not be a reason for delays in implementing programmes specific for women empowerment, the 11th National Five Year Plan (2007-2012), for the first time in the history of Indian planning, focus has shifted focus from mere empowerment of women to recognizing women as agents of sustained socio-economic growth and change. Gender, therefore, has been made a cross-cutting theme; not confined to a single chapter on Women and Children. The Plan also endeavours to guarantee the rights and entitlements of all women, and has recognised that their requirements differ based on their locations within various castes, communities, religions, geographic and development zones.

Mr. Chairman,

Political empowerment is also an essential prerequisite for attainment of progress on women's issues. One of the landmark achievements for the empowerment of women at the political level in India has been the reservation of one-third of urban and local self-government seats for women, thereby giving more than one million women social and political empowerment at the grassroots level. A

similar reservation at the Parliament level is being pursued by the government. India's Joint Parliamentary Committee on Empowerment of Women also independently monitors equality and empowerment of women and ensures that legislations in India are gender responsive.

Mr. Chairman,

In order to improve the socio-economic empowerment of women in India, several programmes have been implemented, namely, mobilization of women into Self Help Groups imparting vocational skills training and encouraging entrepreneurship by providing easy credit facilities. In order to facilitate the employment of women away from their homes, schemes providing support services for women such as Working Women Hostels with day-care and crèche centres have been implemented. India is also implementing the Act on Social Security for Workers, including women workers, in the unorganized sector. Here, I would add that the National Rural Employment Guarantee programme, launched in 2006 for providing 100 days assured wage employment annually to every rural household with at least one-third women beneficiaries, comfortably achieved its target. In fact, more than 49% of the beneficiaries happened to be women. India is progressively marching ahead towards the target of realising the goal of reducing the female poverty ratio by 15% by 2012.

Mr. Chairman,

We have also started Gender Budgeting and creation of a database of gender disaggregated information as major monitoring tools to examine whether women are able to benefit from the policies and programmes instituted for them. Gender budgeting is perceived as a powerful tool not only for tracking allocation of resources for women but also to monitor implementation of issues and outcomes by setting up of gender cells. All Ministries in the Government of India also submit an outcome budgets that ensures effective utilisation of the amount allocated for women in the budget. India has also initiated steps to compile and prepare Gender Development Index and Gender Empowerment Measure for India and States under the GOI- UNDP Project of 'Promoting Gender Equality'.

Our approach to educating women has stemmed from our basic belief that if you educate an individual, you are enlightening an individual, but if you educate a woman, you are enlightening a family. In order to achieve equality in the field of literacy, special emphasis has been given for education of the girl child. Considerable progress has been made and recent data shows that the ratio of female to male students at primary school level has increased in the last 15 years from 0.7: 1 to 0.88:1 and in the secondary school level from 0.5:1 to 0.7:1. Similarly, overall, female literacy rate has increased at the rate of 14.4% in the last 15 years, whereas, male literacy grew only 11.1%.

Mr. Chairman,

Another related issue is the exploitation of women as a result of trafficking of women for various unlawful purposes. Government of India recently amended appropriate provisions in the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act to enable more stringent punishment for the perpetrators of this heinous crime. Additionally, a new

Central Scheme, called, "*Ujjawala*"—a Comprehensive Scheme for Prevention of Trafficking, Rescue, Rehabilitation, Re-Integration and Repatriation of Victims of Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation" was launched in December 2007. Furthermore, in order to stem the problem of cross border trafficking especially of young children and women into India, a Roadmap and Joint Plan of Action has been developed in consultation with other partners and with technical support from UNICEF. Also, in the 11th Five Year Plan, a new central scheme titled 'Relief and Rehabilitation of Victims of Rape', has been proposed for providing specific succor to rape victims. Here I would like to inform you that the Indian Parliament, in 2005 enacted 'The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act' to tackle this scourge in India. 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.

Mr. Chairman,

India will continue to contribute positively to United Nations efforts to reach out to vulnerable sections, particularly women and children, in conflict and post-conflict societies. The international community should also commit to this noble cause by providing new and additional financial resources, transfer of technology, sharing of experiences, expertise, information and data, technical cooperation and capacity-building, to countries that urgently need them. We reiterate our commitment to attaining the goal of equal rights of men and women everywhere

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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