

STATEMENT BY AMBASSADOR HARDEEP SINGH PURI, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE,
AT THE 2012 FIRST REGULAR SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE BOARD OF THE UNITED
NATIONS ENTITY FOR GENDER EQUALITY AND THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN [UN
WOMEN] ON JANUARY 24, 2012

Mr. President,

Permit me at the outset to congratulate you on your election as President of the Bureau, and on behalf of more than 500 million Indian women, I wish you a sterling innings and hope that you would successfully navigate the Board, in pursuing its goals on gender equality and empowerment of women.

My felicitations to the Executive Director and Under Secretary-General, Madam Michelle Bachelet for her statement and I complement her for an insightful and informative report on the operational activities of UN Women, that has been presented today for consideration by the Board.

Mr. President,

As we begin the second operational year of UN Women, my delegation is happy to note the significant milestones that our newly formed entity has achieved in such a short span of time. I am particularly pleased to learn that UN Women has already contributed to the institutionalisation of 176 new or strengthened policies to advance gender equality, including constitutional amendments, in 50 countries both at regional and global levels.

The stellar role played by UN Women in enshrining rights for women into the Kenyan Constitution, in training and support to the electoral process leading to higher representation for women in the Parliament in Sudan, in having the gender equality law passed in El Salvador, or having gender responsive budget guidelines issued in 17 countries, are all significant milestones in a brief but important journey.

While we must also acknowledge that the year 2011 has been a year of transition for UN women, my delegation is encouraged by these beginnings, that have been made, under the dynamic leadership of Madam Bachelet.

Mr. President,

Representing a country which is home to more than 500 million women, let me quote the President of our country, when she said : *No country can achieve its full potential without adequately developing the capabilities of its women.*

Mr. President, women in India have played a pivotal role in shaping our national discourse and policy making. Providing equal opportunities and an enabling environment for women has been a steadfast commitment of the Government of India, all along.

Economic empowerment of Indian women at the grass roots level, especially through the Self-Help Groups has been a hall mark of India 's success story. Out of the six million self help groups in India, more than 80% (*about 4.8 million*) are women's groups, which have provided microfinance, employment and livelihood, and have made a defining change in the lives of millions of Indian women at the village level.

In the field of women's education, which is one of the most critically enabling factors, we have also made significant strides. As per the latest census figures, our female literacy rate rose to 65.46% in 2011, *adding more number of women literates than their male counterparts in the last ten years in India!*

The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments have revolutionized domestic governance and today, nearly 40% of elected representatives in ALL village elected bodies are women. We hope to give this movement of political participation by women, further impetus, by increasing the number of seats reserved in Panchayats and City and Town Governments to 50%. Besides, we are slowly but steadily, also moving towards providing for one third reservation for women in our National Parliament.

Mr. President,

Let me now turn to the main agenda of operational activities of UN Women for this session of the Executive Board. My delegation acknowledges that while there is growing recognition that investing in gender equality and empowerment of women is critical to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, given the current financial environment, work on gender equality and empowerment of women does remain chronically underfunded. We hope that the comprehensive resource mobilisation strategy being developed by UN Women, would certainly widen the donor base in order to secure the resources required by UN Women in meeting its global commitments.

Being fully cognizant of the funding requirement, let me re-iterate Government of India's firm commitment of five million US dollars to UN Women to provide core predictable funding. Earlier this month, India handed over our contribution of one million dollar to UN Women, taking our contribution to two million US dollars, so far. If we have to ensure that UN Women stands for action, the donor community must make generous contributions to UN Women. We will

continue to provide full political and financial support to UN Women and call on others to do likewise.

Mr. President,

In addition to the challenge of funding requirements, we must also explore ways of further improving upon our delivery systems at field level in country specific programmes. As rightly pointed out in the USG's report, UN country teams, while implementing country programmes must also aim to address the national gender priorities and attempt to harmonise the goals of the UN with the national government's, so that it does result in stronger national ownership and increased alignment with the UN.

We are also pleased to learn about the series of new initiatives on gender equality and economic empowerment that have been initiated by UN Women. The adoption of a gender marker through out the UN system to track resources and performance indicators to assess the gender responsiveness of common country programming would certainly contribute to strengthening system wide accountability mechanisms for gender equality.

Given that South South cooperation and development of national capacities is a key component of the UN Women implementation strategy, we are particularly pleased to learn from the USG's report that sharing of success stories and exchange of experiences, in partnership with regional organizations in Asian countries, has facilitated regional cooperation in monitoring strategies to implement commitments of UN women.

Let me conclude, Mr. President, by reaffirming India's steadfast commitment to all round social, economic and political empowerment of our women, whatever effort and resources, the task might take. We assure you that India will always be willing to walk the extra mile, in having the goals outlined in the Strategic Plan implemented at the earliest.

Thank You.

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