

STATEMENT BY MR. AJAI MALHOTRA, AMBASSADOR/DEPUTY PERMANENT  
REPRESENTATIVE, DURING THE THEMATIC DEBATE ON 'PROMOTION OF  
GENDER EQUALITY AND EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN' AT THE UNITED  
GENERAL ASSEMBLY ON MARCH 07, 2007

Madame Chairperson,

Thank you for organizing this thematic debate in the UN General Assembly on 'Promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women'.

Over sixty years ago the UN Charter reaffirmed our collective faith in the equal rights of men and women. Much has been achieved since then but a lot remains to be done. Notwithstanding the normative and legal advances over the last several decades, particularly as regards the rights of women and their social and economic advancement, the gap between *de jure* and *de facto* equality remains in much of the world. There are no quick-fix solutions or 'one size fits all' approach to tackling it. However, any approach should include speedy implementation of legislative and policy measures for greater empowerment of women, besides gender mainstreaming at all levels.

Madame Chairperson,

The 2005 World Summit reaffirmed that full and effective implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Outcome of the 23<sup>rd</sup> UNGA Special Session by all countries is essential for achieving the internationally agreed development goals, including the MDGs. The focus after the 2005 World Summit has shifted to identification of sources for financing gender. While primary responsibility rests with the country concerned 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 World Summit called on the UN Secretary-General and all decision-making UN bodies to take further steps in mainstreaming a gender perspective in the policies and decisions of the UN. It also recognized the need for greater integration of gender perspectives in the implementation of and follow-up to major international conferences as well as in the context of UN reform. Attainment of 50/50 gender distribution in the UN system is also an area requiring immediate focus.

There is a need for inter-governmental consideration by the General Assembly of the report of the High Level Panel on System-wide Coherence, especially its recommendations on the UN's delivery of gender equality and women's empowerment. Reforms that are finally agreed upon should not merely improve the way UN agencies work, but also raise their effectiveness and delivery to developing countries. Furthermore, the elimination of discrimination against women and the empowerment of women should remain firmly on the global agenda.

Madame Chairperson,

As the Prime Minister of India, Dr. Manmohan Singh, noted "India's quest for freedom, dignity and self respect for all our citizens can never become a living reality unless our women are equal partners in all processes of development and governance". 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 Common Minimum Programme of the Government recognizes the political, legal, educational, and economic empowerment of women, as one of the top priorities. It also considers the empowerment of women as one of the key principles of good governance.

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. A similar reservation of seats for women in the Indian Parliament remains under consideration. The Joint Parliamentary Committee on Empowerment of Women, apart from monitoring the application of gender equality principles in all legislation, works to ensure that legislation in India is gender responsive.

The support of civil society, including NGOs, for India's endeavours to promote gender equality has been invaluable. India's strategy for empowering women also includes a target to reduce the female poverty ratio by 5% by 2007 and by 15% by 2012 and to reduce the gender gap in literacy. To advance economic empowerment of rural households, including women, a National Rural

Employment Guarantee programme was launched in 2006. It provides 100 days assured wage employment annually to every rural household with at least one-third of the beneficiaries required to be women. As regards gender mainstreaming, we are going beyond the Women's Component Plan towards gendering all facets and aspects of the 11<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan. Gender budgets have now become an integral part of the budget exercise in India. Self-help women's groups in India have also made a significant impact on the economic empowerment of rural women, benefiting nearly 10 million rural families. 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.

Madame Chairperson,

Violence against women is found in all countries and must be urgently and seriously addressed. The enactment by the Indian Parliament in 2005 of 'The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act' constitutes an important milestone in tackling this scourge in India.

Madame Chairperson,

In the UN context, India was honoured to provide the first Female Formed Police Unit, which recently joined the UN Mission in Liberia (UNIMIL). This participation also reflects India's commitment to assist the UN in more effectively reaching out to vulnerable sections particularly women and children, in conflict and post-conflict societies.

Madame Chairperson,

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

Thank you, Madame Chairperson.

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