

**STATEMENT BY MR. A.K. BHATTACHARJEE, MINISTER ON AGENDA ITEM 112 -
ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN, AGENDA ITEM 113 - IMPLEMENTATION OF THE OUTCOME OF
THE FOURTH WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN AND THE 23RD SPECIAL SESSION OF THE
GENERAL ASSEMBLY, ENTITLED "WOMEN 2000: GENDER EQUALITY, DEVELOPMENT AND
PEACE FOR THE 21ST CENTURY (THIRD COMMITTEE) ON OCTOBER 22, 2001**

Mr. Chairman,

Fifty five years after the Charter of the United Nations reaffirmed our collective faith in the equal rights of men and women, much has been achieved but much more clearly needs to be done. Today, there is wider recognition of the need for a fundamental equality between women and men, but translating this into reality remains a major challenge, particularly, for developing countries.

In India, we have long recognised that policies and programmes for the advancement and empowerment of women must be action oriented and targeted. One third of the seats for elected Village Councils are reserved for women. Numerous institutions and mechanisms for delivery of social services targeted at women of all ages and children are in place. More recently, we have enacted laws to prevent sexual harassment at the work place. Our national human rights machinery bears gender issues and gender mainstreaming, very much in mind, in its work. Our report to the CEDAW, examined in January 2000, demonstrated the seriousness we accord to the implementation of the recommendations of the Fourth World Conference on Women, as well as, to our national priorities and goals for the advancement of women.

Mr. Chairman,

We will briefly comment on the reports before us.

We are not only concerned, but saddened at the precarious condition of INSTRAW, the first institute geared to the advancement of women. We trust, member states will not let it flounder.

In the report on the Improvement of the Situation of Women in Rural Areas, we broadly agree with the major trends and special problems it identifies, like the increasing entry of rural women into the non-formal labour market, the greater impact on them of globalisation, the stresses on the girl child, and the increasing marginalization of women in a fast-monetising rural economy. Solutions for these problems, according to the report, is to implement human rights, adhere to labour standards (presumably, in the informal sector too), provide training and basic social services, develop joint projects among governments, private sector and the civil society. This, at best, is a partial recipe. The macro-factors that cause or aggravate the problems faced by rural women, and the impact on them of the global dynamics of integration, also have to be addressed. Availability of resources for national governments to enable affirmative action to counter the problems faced, particularly by

rural women, is vital. The outcome of the Special Session on Financing for Development will, therefore, be crucial.

Traditional or customary practices affecting the health of women and girls is a social problem that requires not only legislative measures, but also a fundamental social transformation. Poverty discourages social change. The Special Rapporteur on violence against women has clearly shown that low income status had consequences, particularly, for women in terms of their social status and contributed to the prevalence and persistence of harmful traditional or customary practices. The challenge of the eradication of poverty, therefore, is crucial and needs to be addressed urgently.

The United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) has contributed to their economic empowerment and freedom, strengthened women's capacity to achieve sustainable livelihoods, not only for themselves, but their households, and strongly advocated their equal access to economic resources. The new agenda of UNIFEM in promoting women's leadership in governance, peace and security, though important, is not central to its mandate. We hope that there is no slackening of the work on the economic empowerment of women, in which, UNIFEM has considerable strength, experience and demonstrated capability, and where the real challenge continues to lie for the vast majority of developing countries.

Mr. Chairman,

The rolling report on the follow up to and progress made in the implementation of the outcome of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the 23rd Special Session, only outlines the activities of the UN system in mainstreaming gender into its activities. Resolution 55/71, however, had requested a report on the implementation of the recommendations of the 4th World Conference on Women and of the results of the 23rd Special Session of the General Assembly. We hope that in the forthcoming session of the Commission on the Status of Women and at the next General Assembly, we will receive that report