

STATEMENT BY DR. KIRAN CHADHA, JOINT SECRETARY, MINISTRY OF WOMEN AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT, AND MEMBER OF THE INDIAN DELEGATION, ON FOLLOW-UP TO THE FOURTH WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN AND TO THE TWENTY-THIRD SPECIAL SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY, ENTITLED 'WOMEN 2000; GENDER EQUALITY, DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY' "THE EQUAL SHARING OF RESPONSIBILITIES BETWEEN WOMEN AND MEN, INCLUDING CARE-GIVING IN THE CONTEXT OF HIV/AIDS" AT THE 53RD SESSION OF COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN ON MARCH 09, 2009

Mr. Chairman
Distinguished Delegates

I would like to convey my warmest felicitations to you and other members of the Bureau, and to assure you of our full cooperation in the work of this important Commission. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General for all his reports to the Commission especially on the priority theme, namely "The equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS". My delegation associates itself with the statement made by the distinguished representative of Sudan, on behalf of G-77.

Mr. Chairman,

One of the emphases of the 1995 Beijing Declaration and the Platform of Action was the concept of equal sharing of responsibilities and a harmonious partnership between women and men, as a critical element in their well-being and that of their families. In India, it is more a cultural reality that women and girls act as principal care givers in a family. Therefore, it is essential that their capacity is strengthened by providing them resources and facilities. This also involves provision of adequate social and economic infrastructures so that their burden is reduced and men and boys are also equally encouraged to share the responsibility of care-giving.

Mr. Chairman,

The challenges of women and girls in care-giving in ordinary circumstances are considerably increased in families affected by HIV/AIDS, especially in the context of

resources and support provided as well as lack of involvement of men in care giving. It is, therefore, essential that care work is recognized, measured and valued and systematically integrated into policies across all relevant sectors, including education, health and employment. We should also ensure that multi-sectoral policies and programmes are developed and more resources allocated to support home-based care providers, including through access to information on HIV prevention, treatment, care and support. There is also a need to integrate gender perspectives in national HIV/AIDS policies and programmes.

Mr. Chairman,

The ongoing financial crisis has posed a challenge for all countries. However, the negative fallout of this has disproportionately affected the vulnerable group of society, namely women and girls. Women, invariably end up as the first victim of any job reduction policy, resulting in unemployment or underemployment. They are forced to take up jobs which lack job security or involve hazardous working conditions or are under-remunerated. Although gender responsive policies have been implemented by several countries domestically, yet there is need to stress that regional and international cooperation partnership is not only essential but also indispensable. This would mean that developed countries should continue, if not augment, their contributions to various bilateral and multilateral financial assistance programmes.

Several reports of the UN Secretary-General have repeatedly emphasized that global commitments on gender equality have not yet been implemented, and also adequate resources have not yet been allocated. While primary responsibility for allocation of finances rests with the country concerned, it has been recognized that 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 current trend of shortages in ODA flows, and the concomitant negative impact on financing gender by developing countries, particularly the Least Developed Countries, needs to be seriously addressed immediately.

Mr. Chairman,

We are guided by the knowledge that economic growth does not automatically reduce gender inequality on which separate public action is needed to ensure more rapid social change; women's empowerment impacts positively on the lives of men and of children, for example, female education reduces child mortality rates; women are agents of social justice and social change and without their full emancipation there is no social progress.

Mr. Chairman,

Stating a significant and successful Indian example, a model which is worth emulating is the programme called "Swayamsidha", which means self help. The idea behind this scheme is holistic empowerment of women through formation of Self Help Groups [SHGs], awareness generation, economic empowerment and convergence of various schemes by ensuring their direct access to, and control over, resources through a sustained process of mobilization and convergence of all the on-going sectoral programmes. In short it calls for all-round empowerment of women through SHGs, including skills upgradation. In India, we have nearly 2 million SHGs covering 33 million families.

Mr. Chairman,

Before I conclude, I would like to say that in view of shortage of time, I will be circulating a separate detailed statement on India's position on various issues related to CSW later.

Mr. Chairman,

I would like to conclude by saying that today, what is required is a committed effort to change the existing perceptions of prejudice against women to enable their entry into areas of activity that will enhance their capacity to influence decisions affecting their lives. It is thus safe to assume that if we concentrate on empowering women through gender equality, we will actually be promoting the cause of democracy, mitigating poverty, improving general health of women and promoting development to accord the right meaning to status of women in the twenty first century.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.

INDIA
GENDER EQUALITY, DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE
FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

The status of women in India has been subject of many changes over the past few millennia. Women in India now participate in all activities such as education, politics, media, art and culture, service sectors, science and technology, etc. Our Constitution guarantees equal rights for women and men. The Constitution is firmly grounded in the principles of liberty, fraternity, equality and justice. It contains a number of provisions for the empowerment of women. Women's right to equality and non-discrimination are defined as justifiable fundamental rights.

2. The Five Year Development Plan of India, which has evolved over the years from purely "welfare" oriented approach for women to developmental programmes, is currently engaged in women's "empowerment" in all spheres. The Tenth Five Year Plan (2002-07) set into motion the three-pronged strategy of social empowerment, economic empowerment and providing gender justice to create an enabling environment of positive economic and social policies for women and eliminating all forms of discrimination against them and thus advance gender equality goals. The ongoing 11th Five Year Plan (2007-12) intends to reduce gender disparities across regions and communities by ensuring access to basic physical infrastructure as well as health and education services to all. Moreover, gender has been made a cross cutting theme in the programmes.

3. To bring about the advancement, development and empowerment of women, the Ministry of Women & Child Development has formulated a National Policy for the Empowerment of Women 2001. The objectives of the policy include:

- (i) Creating an environment through positive economic and social policies for full development of women to enable them to realize their full potential;
- (ii) The de-jure and de-facto enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedom by women on equal basis with men in all spheres-political, economic, social, cultural and civil;
- (iii) Equal access to participation and decision making of women in social, political and economic life of the nation;
- (iv) Equal access to women to health care, quality education at all levels, career and vocational guidance, employment, equal remuneration, occupational health and safety, social security and public office etc.;
- (v) Strengthening legal systems at elimination of all forms of discrimination against women;
- (vi) Changing societal attitudes and community practices by active participation and involvement of both men and women;

- (vii) Mainstreaming a gender perspective in the development process;
- (viii) Elimination of discrimination and all forms of violence against women and the girl child; and
- (ix) Building and strengthening partnerships with civil society, particularly women's organizations.

4. The Ministry is making substantive efforts to achieve these objectives through policies and planning. The Ministry of Women and Child Development has been implementing a number of schemes, which strive towards holistic economic empowerment to raise the incomes of rural women by updating their skills in the traditional sectors and also by providing micro-credit in a quasi-informal manner. The Ministry has set up support systems like Working Women Hostels, Short Stay Homes and crèches to help women in their struggle towards economic empowerment. The Ministry also implements laws and legislations for women including Dowry Prohibition Act, Protection of women from Domestic Violence Act, etc. to socially empower women.

5. In addition, the Ministry is concerned with the legislative aspects of the following Acts and has also set up a Committee to review them so as to remove gender disparities:

- (i) The Indecent Representation of Women (prohibition) Act, 1986.
- (ii) The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961.
- (iii) The Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act, 1987.
- (iv) The National Commission for Women Act, 1990.
- (v) The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005.
- (vi) Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956.
- (vii) A Bill titled Protection against Sexual Harassment of Women at Work Place [is presently under finalization]

6. New national legislative acts have been passed and some existing acts amended. The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 was the first of its kind in the country which got into the private sphere of a household. For the first time, the term 'domestic violence' has been widened in meaning and scope to include positive civil rights of protection. The Hindu Succession Act has been amended to give daughters equal right as sons in ancestral property, including agricultural land. Priority has been being given to women by reserving at least one-third of the jobs for women who have registered and requested for work under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, which was launched in 2006 to provide 100 days assured wage employment annually to every rural household.

7. Raising the Status of women is not just a moral imperative but also an essential prelude to development. Several steps have been taken to empower women, including a series of women-specific and women related laws, development policies, plans and programmes aimed at women's advancement in political, economic social and legal spheres. The impact of various development policies, plans, programmes implemented

by the Government over the last few years has brought forth a perceptible improvement in the social-economic status of women. Expectation of life at birth has increased over the years. There has been a decline in the infant and maternal mortality rates. The work force participation rate for women has also increased.

8. The Ministry of Women & Child Development has also initiated the activity of compilation of Gender Development Index and Gender Empowerment Index for India under GOI-UNDP project of promoting gender equality. With all these efforts, it is felt that the vision of ensuring overall survival, development, protection and participation of women will be achieved.

9. Gender Budgeting: The importance of Gender Budgeting (GB) has been emphasized in the India's Budgets i.e. the need for budget data to be presented in a manner that brings out the gender sensitiveness of the budgetary allocations and mandate the setting up of Gender Budgeting Cells (GBC) in all Ministries/ Departments for this purpose. In 2004-05, the Ministry adopted "Budgeting for Gender Equality" as a Mission Statement. In order to carry forward the task of Gender Budgeting, Gender Budgeting Cells have been set up in fifty six Ministries/Departments so far. These cells serve as focal points for coordinating both intra and inter-ministerial gender budgeting initiatives. Another important outcome of the application of Gender Budgeting is that it paves the way for gender mainstreaming in the developmental process and in understanding how the needs of women can be addressed in not only "traditional" areas like agriculture, health, education but also in the so called 'gender neutral' sectors like Power, Defence, Chemicals, Biotechnology, Commerce, Information Technology, etc.

10. Self Help Groups (SHG)'s, which have assumed the form of a people's movement, are another important initiative of the Ministry for achieving gender equality. We have 2.2 million SHGs located throughout the country, covering 33 million households. The micro credit programme, with a focused gender empowerment dimension, has impacted positively on the lives of women from less privileged sections of the society.

11. CEDAW: India signed the Convention on Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in July 1980 and ratified it in July 1993. The Convention obligates the State parties to undertake appropriate legislative and other measures to eliminate discrimination against women and for guaranteeing them the exercise and enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedom on the basis of equality with men. The Convention provides the basis for realizing equality between women and men through ensuring women's equal access to, and to equal opportunities in, political and public life -including the right to vote and to stand for election - as well as education, health and employment etc. India has submitted its combined 2nd and 3rd report and the next report is due in 2010.

12. The journey towards gender equality began with the First World Conference on Women in Mexico City in 1975 and in the Fourth Conference in Beijing in 1995 a clear blueprint for action emerged. India accepted the Platform for Action without reservation. Since then, women have moved ahead and are now working towards achieving all the targeted Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to be achieved by 2015 that respond to the world's main development challenges.

13. The promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women is one of the central concerns of the Government of India which spells out a three-pronged strategy of Social Empowerment, Economic Empowerment and Gender Justice as indicated below

- Social Empowerment: create an enabling environment through adopting various policies and programmes for development of women, besides providing them easy and equal access to all the basic minimum services as to enable them to realize their full potential.
- Economic Empowerment: ensure provision of training, employment and income generation activities with both forward and backward linkages with ultimate objective of making all women economically independent and self-reliant.
- Gender Justice — eliminate all forms of gender discrimination and thus enable women to enjoy not only de jure but also de facto rights and fundamental freedom on par with men in all spheres, viz., political, economic, social, civil, cultural, etc.

14. Addressing the MDG 6 concerns combating HIV/ Malaria and other diseases, which are part of this year's main theme of the CSW Meeting, India's approach is as follows:

a) As the pandemic of HIV and AIDS has entered the third decade, we have recognized that social inequalities and power relations have an important impact on HIV transmission. Women and girls are bearing the heavier burden when compared to men. Factors such as poverty, migration and urbanization play a key role in spread of HIV infection but other important variable known to influence the vulnerability of individuals and groups include social background, age, race, gender and sexuality.

b) The general choice for sex lies with men. This is compounded by social norms of seeing women as subservient to men. A recent analysis also suggests that women in many parts of the developing world are less likely to control how, when and where sex takes place, thereby increasing the likelihood of unwanted pregnancy, STDs and HIV. Women's vulnerability to HIV infection is enhanced for several reasons including their lack of awareness of safe sex, economic dependence on men, lack of access to

education, poverty, sexual exploitation, coercion and rape as well as by the fact that women are more likely than men to sell sex in order to survive.

c) Therefore, HIV/AIDS amongst women cannot be tackled by single approach or organization. A multi-sectoral, decentralized, gender sensitive, community based services system is needed. First and foremost, the health care system needs to be engendered. There is perhaps an urgent need that response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic be made multi-sectoral and be integrated into comprehensive, decentralized, participatory community based health services and promote the highest mental and physical health, including empowerment of women to make decisions related to their sexual and reproductive health. A focus on increasing women's ability to access preventive treatment and care services is crucial. At the macro level, the need is to make the system more gender sensitive and women more aware and empowered.

d) Often children from families affected by HIV/AIDS are forced to drop out of school to care for sick parents or to join the workforce to earn for their families. Depending on the economic condition of the family, these children may end up being part of the large number of children from marginalized communities in India such as street children, children of the sex workers, rag pickers, and children using substances. This, in turn leads them to join the 'vulnerable' children/adolescents who are at risk of contracting the disease. Street and working children are forced into child labour, child sex workers or other worst forms of exploitation. Lack of information on HIV, peer pressure and lack of access to clinical care increases their vulnerability and risk to HIV infection.

e) National AIDS Control Programme (NACP) of the Government of India is committed to address the needs of persons infected and affected by HIV, especially children. This is done through the sectors and agencies involved in child protection and welfare. The Government's action plan for an 'exposed or infected' child under NACP and Ministry of Women and Child Development's 11th five year programme is to optimize early diagnosis and identification of HIV exposed infants to provide the package of services under the paediatric guidelines and to ensure social protection of all affected children by strengthening the intervention of Non-Governmental Organisations and establishing minimum standards of care for affected children in all childcare systems.

f) In the light of the pronounced emphasis for convergence and for an effective measure for prevention and mitigation of HIV among women, girls and children and to spell out special initiatives, it is proposed to set up a HIV Cell in the Ministry of Women and Child Development in joint collaboration between the Ministry of Women and Child Development, UNICEF, UNIFEM, FHI and USAID.

15. CONCLUSION: To enhance development effectiveness, gender issues must be an integral part of policy analysis, design and implementation. The promotion of gender equality, empowerment of women and gender justice must be articulated as one of central focus. Women should not be considered a category of people needing welfare

provisioning but rather viewed as major contributors to the country's economy. The primary agenda must be to engender every sector including agriculture, education, health, water and infrastructure etc. Their empowerment is essential not only in the interests of distributive justice but also for the economy's growth. There is a need to engender the development process. It is essential to address gender across dimensions of caste, class, tribal status, poverty and other exclusions. Therefore, restricting the focus to a few issues deemed as "women's issues" will field limited results. A multi-pronged strategy that incorporates a range of measures is essential for empowering women. Participation in the development process itself can take place only if women have access to political power among others. We all must strive towards overall empowerment of women.

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