

Statement by Smt. Preneet Kaur, Minister of State for External Affairs
at the High Level Segment of the 2010 Substantive Session of the
Economic and Social Council of United Nations, on
July 02, 2010

Mr. President,

Allow me to begin by expressing my delegation's deep appreciation for your leadership and the work of your team in navigating the ECOSOC process this year towards a meaningful destination.



Mr. President,

Concerted action on the part of the world's largest economies in the G-20 was able to avert a major economic melt-down following the financial crisis of 2008. But the shoots of recovery that we are seeing can easily be upset by shocks and fluctuations as the Euro-zone crisis has shown.

In such circumstances, it is important that we ensure that global economic recovery is durable, balanced and sustainable.

This is also critical for achieving the MDGs for which we have just five years more. Firm and time bound commitments, including on the provision of resources, transfer of technology and capacity building, are the need of the hour on MDGs.

India has a strong interest in the world economy doing well as this is key enabler for us to pursue growth and bring the fruits of development to all sections of our society.

We also need to focus on medium and long-term structural issues of global governance. The reforms at the Bretton Woods Institutions need to be urgently completed. And, at the UN the Security Council must reflect contemporary realities and expand in both permanent and non-permanent categories.

Mr. President,

The Annual Ministerial Review this year focuses on gender equality and the empowerment of women. This is timely as our MDG aspirations will remain unfulfilled if significant progress is not made on empowerment and equality of women and on their health and education.

India's National Policy for the Empowerment of Women seeks enhancing economic and political empowerment and providing equal access to health care, education and employment for women.

Nearly half of the 46 million rural household beneficiaries of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, one of the world's largest cash for work programmes, are women. Similarly there are over 2 million women's Self Help Groups under the Swarnjayanti Gram Rozgar Yojna, a huge rural employment programme.

In education, we have recently launched Saakshar Bharat, a national programme for female literacy, to impart functional literacy to around 60 million adult women. Moreover, our newly enacted Right to Education Act, guarantees free and compulsory education to all children in the age group of 6-14 years. Girls will be its obvious focus.

Our figures on maternal and infant mortality continue to be unacceptably high. Our efforts in reducing maternal and infant mortality through various schemes including the Janani Suraksha Yojna, a cash assistance programme, are beginning to yield results.

We are particularly concerned at the low child sex ratio in our country, the disparity between female and male literacy rates, the exceptionally high maternal mortality rates, the far lower women's work participation rate as compared to men and issues of violence against women.

There is perceptible improvement in the social-economic status of women in India today as a result of our sustained efforts. We are, however, mindful of the enormous challenges we have still to overcome.

Mr. President,

We are justifiably proud that today in India women are participating in greater numbers in the political process and in our decision making structures. Visibly, they occupy some of the highest political positions in the country including as our President, the Speaker of the Lok Sabha, the House of Representatives in our Parliament and the Leader of the ruling coalition.

However, less visible but equally important, we have more than a million elected women representatives in local government. This is a fruit of our policy to institutionalize women's participation at local government level by reserving one third of seats in the village panchayats more than 17 years ago. And, recently we have tabled a bill to raise these seats to 50%. Legislative action is also on the anvil to institutionalise women's participation in Parliament and State legislatures.

Mr. President,

The last ten years have seen a continuous chorus of calls for reforms at the UN.

I am very happy that one of the most important such efforts, the setting up of an entity to provide leadership and to mainstream women's issues in a coherent and focused manner at the UN, has finally borne fruit.

This is a transformational moment for the UN and I am glad that the Indian delegation played an active role in resolving key contentious issues and ensuring forward movement.

As I noted earlier in my address, achievement of MDGs hinges crucially on women being specially targeted so that they become equal beneficiaries of the gains of development. It is imperative that UN WOMEN operationalizes itself on an urgent basis and receives our full backing. There is far too much work to do.

Thank You.

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