



**STATEMENT BY MS. PARUL DEBI DAS, JOINT SECRETARY,
DEPARTMENT OF WOMEN AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT ON THE ROLE OF
MEN AND BOYS IN ACHIEVING IN GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S
EQUAL PARTICIPATION IN CONFLICT PREVENTION, MANAGEMENT
AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND IN POST-CONFLICT PEACE-
BUILDING; AT THE 48TH SESSION OF COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF
WOMEN ON MARCH 3, 2004**

Madam Chairperson,

We congratulate you on your election as Chairperson of the 48th session of the Commission on the Status of Women, and commend your dynamism in conducting the proceedings of the Commission. We extend our felicitations to the other members of the Bureau, and assure you of India's full support in the proceedings of this Commission.

My delegation thanks the distinguished Permanent Representative of Finland, Ambassador Rasi, for her statement to the Commission in her capacity as President of the Economic and Social Council. I also wish to thank Under-Secretary-General Ocampo and other senior UN officials for their valuable introductions to the issues before the Commission.

We would like to convey our appreciation to the Secretary General for the quality of the documentation that has been prepared for the session, as well as for the arrangements made for the high-level round table and the two panel discussions.

My delegation associates itself with the statement made earlier by the distinguished representative of Qatar as Chairman of the Group of 77.

This 48th Session of the Commission offers us the opportunity to take stock of the progress made by all of us towards achieving the targets set and the commitments made in the Platform for Action as well as at the 23rd Special Session of the General Assembly, especially with regard to the two priority themes. In view of the fact that the agenda is vast, we shall confine our comments to the two highly pertinent priority themes of this session.

Madam Chairperson,

Men and boys naturally have a crucial role in the achievement of gender equality and in the empowerment of women. The need to emphasise men's shared responsibility

has been agreed upon internationally for several years now, owing to discernment of the benefits that this brings.

Greater involvement of men and boys in achieving gender equality has an all-encompassing benefit and a much wider impact on the entire society, as this can also contribute effectively to the enjoyment of human rights and the efforts towards the promotion of democracy, eradication of poverty, increasing economic growth and attaining other developmental goals and objectives.

In India, the shift of focus in government policy and planning from women *per se* to gender relations has led to increased attention to the vital role of men and boys. Government actions and civil society involvement in the area of gender relations have now developed a stronger focus on the positive role men and boys can play in promoting women's empowerment in the home, in the community and in the workplace.

The established role of men in taking decisions related to education, health and marriage of their daughters is now, increasingly, being shared by the women of the household. As a result of greater empowerment of women in the social, economic and political spheres, men and boys have become more receptive to women's perspectives and choices. The curricula from the school to the University levels are being revised to make them more gender-sensitive. Equally significant, the female literacy rate has increased faster than the male literacy rate resulting in the narrowing of the gender gap from 24.85 percent to 21.68 percent. Further, there is a rising trend of women's participation in higher education, including non-traditional professional courses and occupations.

The role of men in improving reproductive and child health (RCH), has been recognised and promoted in the Government's nation-wide RCH programme, which stresses on popularising newer methods of male sterilisation and increased male responsibility and participation in the prevention of HIV/AIDS and other STIs.

Madam Chairperson,

Recognising a supportive and pro-active role for boys and men in promoting gender equality, the Government has ensured that gender mainstreaming remains a vital component of its policies, plans and programs.

Apart from setting up a nodal department responsible for gender initiatives, the Department of Women and Child Development, the Government's commitment is also evident in the creation of a women's cell in all departments, so as to build in gender aspects of the policies and programs of the specific department. This has ensured that not less than 42.9 percent of the gross budgetary support flows to women-specific and women-related Departments during the 9th Plan period (1997-2002)

The National Commission for Women (NCW) and the National Human Rights Commission, the two premier statutory bodies of the country, are actively involved in protecting the legal and constitutional safeguards provided for women and in gender-sensitisation of related traditionally male-dominated organisations.

The Government has been pro-actively engaged in gender-sensitising the law enforcement agencies, especially the police as well as the judiciary, which are largely dominated by men. Premier training institutions of the Government, such as the National Police Academy, the Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Public Administration, and many state-level training institutes, have introduced capsules on gender training with a view to promoting greater gender sensitivity and equality.

Alliances with men and men's organisations are being strengthened to combat violence against women.

Madam Chairperson,

In addition to the interventions in the specific areas of the two themes, many factors such as the rise of education, rapid urbanisation, economic development and changes in society have contributed in a significant measure to the changing attitudes and role of men with regard to gender issues. These changes have brought with them their own momentum but we need to ensure that women get equal benefits and are given an equal role in the emerging world order. Media can play a dynamic catalytic role in bringing about change by portraying role models who show alternative masculine and caring behaviour as part of an effort to change attitudes.

Madam Chairperson,

The second priority theme "Women's equal participation in conflict prevention, management and conflict resolution and in post-conflict peace-building" assumes considerable importance in view of the fact that civilians are increasingly the victims, sometimes unintended and sometimes intended, of the violent conflicts that occur in different parts of the world today. It has been estimated that close to 90 percent of current casualties of conflict are civilians, the majority of whom are women and children, compared to a century ago when 90 percent of those who lost their lives were military personnel. Women and children constitute some 80 percent of the world's refugees and other displaced persons as a result of conflict. They are threatened by deprivation of property, goods and services and their right to return to their homes of origin as well as by violence and insecurity.

While entire communities suffer the consequences of armed conflict, women and children are particularly affected because of their status in society and their gender. It is however, important to move away from the stereotype of viewing women solely as victims of conflict. Greater focus needs to be placed and enhanced efforts need to be made to remove the obstacles often created by customs and traditions which narrowly define the role of women in public life and decision-making in many societies. Women are required to take on the principal role of providers in the family during conflicts, and are particularly active in the peace movements at the grassroots level and cultivating peace within their communities. Yet, the absence of women at the peace-negotiating table is noticeable, without which inclusive participation of women in peace-building cannot be realised. Their role in re-construction and nation building is a vital one.

Having suffered deprivation and comprising more than half the population of a nation, their involvement cannot be denied.

Madam Chairperson,

The focus of the Commission on the priority themes should help us to take stock of the situation of women as well as the situations affecting women today. As with all issues, and as Under Secretary General Ocampo pointed out in his introductory statement, the challenge is to ensure implementation and follow-up action of the inter-governmental agreements and commitments in this area. We are in agreement with his assertion that despite significant advances, the gaps and challenges to achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women remain extremely serious. In respect of the developing countries, it needs to be reiterated that they would not be in position to face these challenges by themselves, and enhanced international cooperation is imperative if their efforts are to succeed.

We, therefore, await the review and appraisal process at the Commission at its 49th session and look forward to working with other delegations in planning and preparing for the commemoration in the General Assembly of the 10th anniversary of the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

I thank you, Madam Chairperson.

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