

Agenda Item 107 & 108: Implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women and of the Special Session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the twenty-first century"

Statement by Hon'ble Mr. S. Ramachandra Reddy, MP on October 9, 2000

Madam Chairperson,

My delegation would like to thank Special Advisor to the Secretary General Ms Angela King and Director, Division for Advancement of Women, Ms. Erturk for their statements. We also appreciate the quality of the reports before us.

The 23rd Special Session of the General Assembly, "Women 2000: Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the 21st century" took stock of progress achieved in the implementation of the commitments made at the Beijing Conference in 1995 within the current context of the sweeping changes brought about by globalisation and resultant transformation in societies. New initiatives to strengthen the Platform for Action were agreed upon, such as; efforts to close the gender gap by 2005, ensuring free and universal primary education by 2015, a 50% improvement in the levels of adult literacy by 2015, removal of discriminatory legislative provisions by 2005 and universal access to high quality healthcare by 2015. More recently, the Millennium Declaration called for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women as effective ways to combat poverty, hunger and disease.

Despite newer initiatives and commitments, the sad reality is that the situation of the world's women is progressively deteriorating. UNIFEM's report on "Progress of the World's Women" has pointed out what is already widely recognised; that with globalisation the inequalities between men and women has grown. The World Bank has also highlighted that by 2015, the number of the absolute poor who live on less than a dollar a day will be a staggering 1.9 billion, most of them women.

While the subject of globalisation continues to be debated, the simple truth is that for some countries globalisation has generated newer opportunities, but for most others it has brought marginalisation and growing inequalities. Resources available to governments have increasingly diminished with a contraction of their freedom to manage their economies and promote social development. The ability of states and societies to attain the goals of the major conferences including those of the Special Sessions of the General Assembly has often been thwarted.

Societies that have had the greatest gender equality have progressed the fastest. Gender equality therefore is critical to the developmental process. If the link between gender equality and development is recognised, then it must be ensured that women are not marginalised and increasing feminisation of poverty be halted. And here lies the contradiction. On the one hand, international forces dominated by globalisation have often constricted the ability of governments to deliver on targets, while on the other, governments are being increasingly asked to fulfill targets sets in international conferences, without even the minimal commitment on international development cooperation. Nowhere was this

more evident than in the Special Sessions on Beijing+5 and Copenhagen+5. The Political Declarations during these two recent special sessions mentions that countries would only “strive” to fulfill their international commitments on ODA. An opportunity will, however, present itself during the forthcoming consultative meetings in preparation for the High Level Inter-governmental Meeting on Financing for Development, for governments to demonstrate their commitments through affirmative actions in international development cooperation.

India’s initial report to the CEDAW was considered earlier this year and therefore, I will refrain from enumerating the interlocking array of policies and programmes that continue to be implemented in my country. We are in the process of examining the comments made by the Committee to see how best they can be implemented. We have designated the year 2001 as “Women’s Empowerment Year”. Our two pronged strategy for the empowerment of women continues to encompass mainstreaming of gender in all policies and programmes cutting across all sectors and levels while simultaneously making women-specific interventions in cooperation with all segments of the society. Thus, the literacy rate of women has increased faster than for men, reproductive health has improved while micro-credit institutions have successfully mobilized action in local communities. With over one million village level workers, the “Integrated Child Development Service” programme remains one of the largest outreach programmes anywhere in the world. While we are encouraged by the improvements, we still have many miles to go which we shall traverse with determination and dedication.

Madam Chairperson,

Before closing I would like to inject a note of caution on the current trend of the Security Council over-reaching its mandate to pronounce itself on matters which essentially fall within the purview of the General Assembly. The Security Council may inform itself of the developments taking place in the bodies under the ECOSOC, but should refrain from policy directions or pronouncements when it debates the subject of women in armed conflict on 24th October. In our view, more than anything else, the promotional aspect of the advancement of women needs to be given priority rather than drawing imaginary tangential lines with security issues. This distortion of priorities is amply demonstrated in the situation of the INSTRAW which faces the guillotine while resources and attention are diverted elsewhere.