

**Remarks by
Ambassador Syed Akbaruddin
Permanent Representative**

**128th Birth Anniversary of 'Babasaheb' Dr. B.R. Ambedkar
"Enabling Women's Economic Empowerment:
Role of Laws & Policies"**

**April 12, 2019
1100 to 1230 hrs
CR6, UNHQ**

Excellencies, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you all for joining us at this special event to pay homage to 'Babasaheb' Dr. B.R. Ambedkar on his 128th birth anniversary.

2. This is the fourth time that we are commemorating the birth anniversary at the United Nations of this towering figure of modern India.
3. Born in 1891, Dr. Ambedkar braved barriers of prejudice and discrimination and emerged as a gifted student, earning degrees from both Columbia University and the London School of Economics.
4. His scholarship traversed diverse fields of inquiry – law, economics, politics and religion to mention a few.
5. During his public life spanning over four decades, he served as a legislator in the State Assembly, a Member of Parliament, Chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Constitution of India and as independent India's first Law Minister.

6. At commemorative events in previous years, we have focused on various contemporaneous aspects of Dr Ambedkar's thinking.

7. This year we meet to focus on Dr. Ambedkar's advocacy of equal rights for women, which was rooted in his belief of the efficacy of law, and legal protection to safeguard equal rights for all.

8. Even in the 1920s, when much of the world was still debating the idea of voting rights for women, Dr. Ambedkar advocated universal adult franchise. As the architect of India's constitution, he ensured that this fundamental democratic principle becomes an integral part of the India's politico-legal system. His thinking permeates the provisions of India's constitution, enshrining equal rights and opportunities for women in political, economic and social spheres, prohibition of discrimination on the ground of sex, equal means of livelihood, and equal pay for equal work, humane working conditions and maternity relief.

9. Dr. Ambedkar once said, "I measure the progress of a community by the progress women have achieved".

10. As the first Law Minister of independent India, he sought to codify equal rights for women in matters of marriage, property and inheritance through legislation. He tendered his resignation as his initiative did not find support among the lawmakers at that time. Dr. Ambedkar's decision inspired a wave of actions that later culminated into codification of equal rights for women in personal matters.

11. Dr. Ambedkar's quest for equality among women and men in the economic sphere is far from over. Gender inequality remains a pressing global issue. It is not just a moral or social imperative, but a significant economic challenge of our time.

12. A study by McKinsey Global Institute shows that if women participate in the economy, identically as men, US \$28 trillion can be added to global

annual GDP by 2025. Even by a more conservative estimate, greater participation of women in economy can boost global annual GDP by \$12 trillion in 2025.

13. To harness this economic potential, we need to address the multiple barriers faced by women. Fewer legal rights and discriminatory laws, political underrepresentation, time spent in unpaid work, financial and digital exclusion, lack of decent job opportunities and violence against women calls for much greater attention.

14. We also need to address challenges posed by technological changes that can potentially increase gender inequalities in the labour market.

15. In today's world, these are globally pervasive issues. We need to explore different formats of cooperation and develop new alliances to address them. Multilateral fora provide opportunities for such exploration.

16. We do understand that participation in the world of work for women involves important personal choices. But we need to remove the systemic barriers that hinder the possibility of making those personal choices.

17. Today, we have an impressive panel of experts to reflect upon the range of options available with us. We are fortunate to have diverse representation on the panel to inform our discussions from different perspectives.

18. It is my pleasure to invite my colleague, Ms. Paulomi Tripathi, to take over and initiate the discussion with the distinguished panelists.

Thank you.