



**INDIA**  
**भारत**

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**STATEMENT**

**BY**

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PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF INDIA TO THE UNITED NATIONS**

**ON THE**

**IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BEIJING DECLARATION AND PLATFORM FOR  
ACTION AND THE OUTCOMES OF THE 23<sup>RD</sup> SPECIAL SESSION OF THE  
GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

**AT THE**

**54<sup>TH</sup> SESSION OF COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN**

**New York**

**March 5, 2010**



**Mr. Chairman,**

Please allow me to congratulate you on your election to chair this Commission. I would also like to congratulate the other members of the Bureau on their election and thank the Secretary General for his reports.

We align ourselves with the statement made by Yemen, on behalf of the G-77.

**Mr. Chairman,**

Gender equality and women's empowerment lie at the heart of development and distributive justice. Empowering women is the most effective tool for development as well as for poverty reduction and an essential pre-requisite for achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. The agenda of development will remain incomplete in so long as it excludes more than half the world's population.

It has now been fifteen years since the Beijing Platform for Action was adopted. This session of the Commission offers an opportunity to evaluate our performance in attaining gender equality and empowerment - a task that still remains incomplete in the world, in our region and in our respective countries. Our deliberations here are important not only for taking stock but also to look at ways of overcoming the considerable challenges that still remain before us.

India is resolutely committed to the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action. It is critical that the international community lives up to its commitments of financial resources, technical cooperation and capacity-building for developing countries in meeting their national priorities in the areas of gender empowerment. As a country that has considerable experience in nation building, we stand ready to share our expertise and knowledge with fellow developing countries.

We favour the early establishment of a comprehensive gender entity in the United Nations. This should be carefully conceived and designed to serve as a focal point for all gender related activities and programmes in the UN. It should be well-resourced. It should be designed to mainstream the interests of women and serve their cause.

In this context, we are appreciative that the Joint Coordinating Committee, consisting of countries of G-77 and the Non-Aligned Movement, has submitted to the co-facilitators of the system-wide coherence process, a comprehensive, forward-looking and progressive document containing concrete and essential elements for the new Entity.

**Mr. Chairman,**

In India, we have a proud legacy of celebrating the role of women that stretches back to time immemorial. It is captured in our civilizational and cultural ethos, scriptures, and philosophies. For example, as far back as the third millennium

BC, women's empowerment was recognized in the form of worship of Mother Goddess during the Indus Valley civilization. The terracotta figurines of the Mother Goddess, recovered in excavations, are the earliest manifestations of the power vested in women. This idea runs through the ages in Indian religions and philosophy.

Centuries later, in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, women played a stellar and unique role in India's freedom struggle. Women took part in large numbers and fought shoulder to shoulder with men. No democratic revolution had ever before given women equality of status as was evidenced during India's freedom struggle. It was unprecedented and served as a point of historic departure by upholding women's rights.

With the birth of the modern Indian nation-state, the principles of gender equality were further codified and enshrined in the Constitution of India, which not only guarantees equality to women, but it also advocates positive discrimination in favour of women, wherever necessary. These are reinforced through periodic amendments in legislation and policy.

In 2001, we formulated the National Policy for the Empowerment of Women. Its main objectives include creating a positive economic and social environment, enhancing political empowerment, providing equal access to health care, education and employment, strengthening legal systems to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women, developing programmes to change societal attitudes and harmful community practices and most importantly, building and strengthening partnerships with civil society, particularly women's organizations.

The ongoing Eleventh Five Year development plan of India (2007-12), which serves as our strategic framework for development, has recognized the role of women as agents of sustained socio-economic growth and change. Gender is a cross-cutting theme in all the development plans.

There are a large number of programmes and schemes being implemented today for the mainstreaming of gender activities and concerns throughout the Government of India. I would like to highlight a few.

The Education for All Campaign (Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan) with a special focus on girls' education, aims to target the 'hardest to reach' girls through residential schools, mid day meals and other incentives.

The National Literacy Mission has been recast as the Female Literacy Mission and aims to target 70 million adults in the next 5 years, out of which 60 million will be women.

Health constitutes another focus area. The National Rural Health Mission aims to provide quality health care for women, with provision for institutional deliveries. An additional programme, Conditional Maternity Benefit Scheme (Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahayog Yojana) aims at improving the health and nutritional status of pregnant and lactating women.

There is perceptible improvement in the social-economic status of women today as a result of decades of development programmes implemented on the ground. A major milestone has been the Self-Help Group (SHG) movement. We have over 2.2 million Self Help Groups at the grass roots level throughout the country, which translates into more than 33 million households. There has been a decline in the infant and maternal mortality rates with the IMR at 53 (2008) and MMR at 254 (2006). While we are the first to acknowledge that we still have distance to cover in order to achieve the Millennium Development Goals we have set for ourselves, we are heartened by the progress we have made so far.

**Mr. Chairman,**

India is conscious of the significance of political empowerment in the overall empowerment of women. We are happy that today women leaders occupy the highest positions in several countries, including India.

In India, we took the historic initiative of reserving one-third of the seats in local bodies for women. As a result, more than a million Indian women are now politically empowered at the grassroots level. This has enabled them to engage in the mainstream discourse of development as well as wield decision making authority at the very cutting edge. Parliament now has bills before it to raise this percentage to 50%.

Political empowerment of women in India received a further shot in the arm with the recent Cabinet decision to agree to table a bill for 33% reservation of seats for women in the Parliament.

**Mr. Chairman,**

More than eighty years ago, Mahatma Gandhi had declared in the Indian context that as long as women did not take part in public life there was no salvation for the country. This is equally true for every corner of the globe.

As we gather here to commemorate the 15<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action, let us use this opportunity to recommit ourselves to the goals of gender equality and empowerment. The time for genuine and full empowerment of women is here and now. This is an idea whose time has truly come, but whose realisation we must all now work to ensure at the earliest.

I would like to end by quoting from one of our ancient scriptures:

*Yatra naryastu pujoyante ramante tatra devataha (Manusmriti 3.56)*  
*Where women are worshipped, there the Gods reside*

**Thank you Mr. Chairman.**

