



PAKISTAN

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8 EAST 65th STREET – NEW YORK, NY 10021 – (212) 879-8600

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Statement

By

Ms. Shazia Marri

Minister for Information Sindh

on

Agenda Item 3(a)

Equal Sharing of Responsibilities between Women and
Men, Including
Caregiving in the Context of HIV/AIDS

53rd Session of the
United Nations Commission on the Status of Women

March 4, 2009
New York

Pakistan's Statement on Agenda Item 3(a)(i)
"the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men,
including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS"**at the 53rd Session of the**
Commission on the Status of Women
March 4, 2009

**Chairperson,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen**

It is indeed a privilege to be part of this august gathering at the United Nations. At the outset, we wish to commend dedication and perseverance of the Chairperson and the entire Bureau of the Commission on the Status of Women, for their continued efforts of carrying out the challenging work of the Commission since last year. I assure you full support of the Pakistan delegation.

2. We also thank the Secretary General for his pertinent reports on agenda items put before us during the session.
3. Our delegation aligns itself with the statement made by the distinguished representative of Sudan on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

Chairperson,

4. The Commission on the Status of Women is keeping the Beijing Platform for Action alive. It provides opportunities to Member States to share their best practices, achievements and challenges in various critical areas.
5. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action recognized that a more equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men enhances the opportunities of women and girls to shape and design public policy, practice and expenditure so that their interests may be recognized and addressed.
6. The Declaration also called for strengthened national capacity to create and improve gender-sensitive policies and programmes on HIV/AIDS, including the provision of resources and facilities to women who find themselves the principal caregivers or economic support for those infected with HIV/AIDS.
7. Gender equality and empowerment of women have particular significance in our efforts to achieve the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals. This year's priority theme "the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS", is particularly relevant to accelerate the implementation of Millennium Development Goal 3 and Goal 6.

Chairperson,

8. One of the most important positive developments during the past decades has been the emergence of new advocacy groups and a changed perspective on the awareness of women's rights. The decade has seen a quantitative and qualitative increase in activism, focusing on enhancing women's share in power and decision-making at all levels. Women have been given increased role in every sphere of life. Women are now working and serving in every field.

9. Besides these positive developments, many responsibilities in the private and public realms are still divided along gender lines. In most traditional societies, domestic tasks and caregiving responsibilities still lies largely with women. Majority of women prefer to remain at home as homemakers rather than join the workforce. Many are prevented from working by family or spouses or other factors including the need to take care of children.

10 Their work remains restricted to informal sectors, unmeasured and less paid. Not legally recognized workers, they are deprived of the benefits of labour legislation, as well as of any participation in the formal challenges of collective bargaining. Additional issues such as mobility, security and workplace environment also put significant bearing in their effective participation and contribution to national economy.

11. This unequal division of labor and responsibilities within households based on unequal power relations significantly limits women's potential to find the time and develop the skills required for effective participation in decision making. Under these circumstances they continue remaining at a social, economical and political disadvantageous position.

Chairperson,

12. With reference to the key theme of this year's CSW, I would like to highlight some points on HIV/AIDS. There are more than half a million women in South Asia affected by HIV/AIDS. Women know considerably less than men about how HIV/AIDS is transmitted and how to prevent infection, and what little they do know is often rendered useless by the discrimination and violence they face.

13. In most cases, women are economically and financially dependent on male partners and family members. Women, whose partners fall sick and die, particularly of HIV/AIDS, frequently suffer discrimination, abandonment, and violence. So do women who are suspected of having HIV/AIDS themselves.

14. Research has shown that policies that promote economic and educational opportunities for women and provide for protection of their property and inheritance rights, are the core components of national HIV/AIDS strategies. Training has to be provided for the police on how to deal with women issues, property inheritance and legal rights.

15. The National AIDS Control Programme (NACP), launched by the government in 1990, is an umbrella project which lays down the policy guidelines for implementation through Provincial AIDS Control Programme and civil society. Main objectives of the programme are: the prevention of HIV transmission, establishment of surveillance, treatment and care programme training of health staff, and research. The government's commitment is reflected by the fact that about 80% of all expenditures on HIV/AIDS has been financed by the Government of Pakistan.

Chairperson,

16. In Pakistan, the inspiration for gender equality and empowerment of women comes from the vision of our founding father Quaid-e-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah who in 1948 said "No nation can rise to the height of glory unless your women are side by side with you". And in keeping with this philosophy, the Pakistan Constitution ratified under the premiership of Mr. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, guarantees women equal rights and opportunities and safeguards for the same.

17. Today Pakistan proudly has the first woman Speaker of the National Assembly in the region, 17 women Senators (17%) out of 100-member Upper House and 76 women parliamentarians (22.5%) out of 338 members of Lower House. Pakistan ranks 44 in the 188 member Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) in terms of women percentage in national parliaments.

18. Pakistan's women parliamentarians have become a collective inspiration and visible force that will continue to drive the agenda of gender equality forward. These are the women elected to highest offices and have a direct impact on the decision-making processes at all levels.

19. The following are some institutional and administrative measures taken by the present government to further promote gender equality and empowerment of women:

One: A revolutionary Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) has been launched by the present democratically elected government with an initial amount of Rs 34 billion for social and financial uplift of women. Under the programme, Rs 1,000 per month will be given to the woman head of the family of almost 4.5 million families.

Two: A mega project "Gender Reform Action Plan (GRAP)", mandated to undertake a coherent gender reform agenda through phased implementation processes, with particular focus on gender mainstreaming, has been in place since past few years.

Three: Recently, a Women Parliamentarians Caucus has been constituted to liaise and build working relationship with key state and civil society institutions and organizations.

Four: For prevention and timely response to all forms of violence against women, a Gender Crime cell has been established under the Ministry of Interior.

Five: SAARC Convention on Trafficking in Women has been ratified, and Protection of Women (Criminal Laws Amendment) Act, 2006, is under review.

Six: Mindful of the challenges faced by women at the workplace, and committed to minimizing the same, the Government has introduced legislation to provide for protection to women against harassment at the workplace.

Seven: In keeping with the spirit of Islam, which provides women both rights and protection, and recognizing the challenges posed by prevailing traditions and archaic customs to the contrary, the Pakistan Penal Code has been amended to ensure adequate penalty to anyone attempting to coerce a woman into marriage or illicit sexual relations.

Eight: In an effort to encourage maximum participation of women in the workforce, the initiative Benazir Bhutto Youth development programme has been introduced which provides training to young people, particularly girls in various disciplines, accompanied by a monthly stipend during training. This programme not only allows a modicum of financial independence, it also enables them to enter the skilled workforce and strive towards equality and empowerment.

Nine: As an agro based economy, tracts of cultivable land have been awarded to women, enabling them to independently earn a livelihood.

Chairperson,

20. It must be acknowledged that women are fundamental component of the global economy. Regrettably however, their share in economic benefits, opportunities and access to resources is not proportionate to their share in world population. But women alone should not counter this discrimination and exploitation. The adverse effect of the economic crisis on women requires urgent and concerted attention; and increased involvement of the UN system and donor community, in all poverty reduction strategies.

21. The care giving role needs to be calculated, compensated, and shared without prejudice and discrimination. Attention must be devoted to extensive research, dissemination of accurate information and increasing cognizance among men towards equal functions and responsibilities as care givers. Incentives including flexible working hours, negotiable leave, and childcare facilities at the workplace, must be introduced to encourage equal sharing of parental responsibilities between women and men.

Chairman,

22. It is time for the global community to come together and strive towards true empowerment of women world over. At this crucial juncture, neutrality is equivalent to opposition, which brings to mind the words of Dante who reminded us that “the hottest place in hell is reserved for those who remain neutral in times of moral crisis”. And when we leave this august forum to return to the lands where we must continue our struggle, we must all be secure in the belief that our joint vision of equality will soon be translated into an enduring and irreversible reality.

I thank you Chairman.