



INDIA
भारत

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STATEMENT

BY

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ON THE

**IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BEIJING DECLARATION AND
PLATFORM FOR ACTION AND THE OUTCOME OF
THE 23RD SPECIAL SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

AT THE

55TH SESSION OF COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

NEW YORK

FEBRUARY 28, 2011

Mr. Chairman

This is a historic session as it is the first session after the creation of UN Women. India wishes its first Executive Director, Ms Michelle Bachelet every success. The pooling of resources and merging of various UN organizations working for the advancement of women into 'UN Women' sends a strong message that the advancement of women is to be dealt with using a more comprehensive and convergent gender approach, reinforced with adequate and more focused funding. India supports and welcomes this Strategy.

Mr Chairman,

Over the years, women in India have increasingly overcome traditional mindsets and gender stereotypes. We are proud that today, we have the unique distinction of having all women at the top positions. The President of India, Speaker of the Lower House of the Parliament and the leader of the largest political party in the country as well as the leader of the opposition in the Lower House of the Parliament are all women.

Indian women entrepreneurs are occupying positions as top executives in banks and corporate board rooms in India as well as globally.

The Constitution of India guarantees equality of status of women and has laid the foundation for such advancement. It also permits reverse discrimination in favour of women and many important programmes have been designed specifically to benefit girls and women.

India's central planning body, the Planning Commission of India, through its Five Year Plans is committed to enable women to be "equal partners and participants in development". The ongoing Eleventh Five Year development plan of India (2007-12) has recognized women as agents of sustained socio-economic growth and change and funding as well as programmatic support is being provided to a large number of gender specific programmes and schemes, in addition to gender mainstreaming throughout the Government of India. Let me highlight, some of our major programmes and schemes.

Education:

Sustained effort has been made for removal of the barriers to girl's education. By Constitutional amendment free and compulsory education up to the age of 14 is the responsibility of the State. Our National policy on Education articulates Government of India's unequivocal commitment that "education will be used as an agent of basic change in the status of women."

Reaching out to the girl child has also been central to the efforts of the Government of India to achieve MDG 2 and universalize elementary education. A two pronged gender strategy has been adopted to make the education system responsive to the needs of girls through targeted interventions which serve as a pull factor to enhance access and retention of girls in schools and also generate a community demand for girls' education through training and mobilization. The strategy is showing results and today gender parity in enrolment has been achieved and there is improvement in other indicators as well.

Health:

Health is yet another important 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.

Science and Technology:

Some of the programmatic efforts in relation to technology and women include:

- a) provision of opportunities to women scientists to work from home to ensure that the talent of women scientists is not wasted
- b) Large scale involvement of women scientists in developmental programmes
- c) Provision of opportunities to girls in rural areas to access quality inputs in science and mathematics so that they can take up careers in science and engineering
- d) Women scientists are being encouraged to pursue research in frontier areas of science and engineering, on problems of societal relevance
- e) Supporting women scientists for self-employment by utilizing their specialized domain knowledge in areas such as patenting, proof reading, science journalism, technical translation, clinical pathology labs, medical transcription etc, to name a few
- f) Motivation and encouragement to women scientists through National awards for outstanding performance.

India's achievements in the IT sector have been acclaimed globally. Availability of jobs in BPOs and the flexibility to work from home have contributed significantly to women's economic empowerment.

Another significant development has been mobile telephony in India where 13 million connections are added every month. Quietly a social revolution is taking place as millions of women especially in remote rural areas find themselves exposed to better market information, weather forecasts, and other information which is empowering them.

To preserve traditional knowledge, of which the major repositories are women, India has created the National Innovation Foundation, a unique initiative which has won global acclaim.

Employment:

The government of India has recently launched the National flagship programme NREGA (National Rural Employment Guarantee Act), under an Act of Parliament, aimed at enhancing livelihood security of households in rural areas of the country by providing at least one hundred days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year to every household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work. There is 30% reservation for women under the scheme.

So far a total employment of nearly 1 billion person days has been generated and almost 50 per cent of those employed have been women. The Act is sensitive to working conditions of women workers as it advocates providing accessible worksite (within 5 kms of workers' residence), crèches for women with children below six and, above all, gender parity of wages.

The formation of Self Help Groups of women has enabled them to access cheap credit and generate means of self-employment. Over 2.2 million Self Help Groups have been set up at grassroots level throughout the country, which translates into more than 33 million households thus supported.

India has also enacted the Equal Remuneration of Work Act mandating payment of equal remuneration to men and women workers for the same or similar nature of work.

Training

India's planning process spells out a three pronged strategy to empowering women including social empowerment, economic empowerment and gender justice. Provision of training and employment and income generation activities with both forward and backward linkages with the ultimate objective of making all women economically independent and self reliant is at the backbone of economic empowerment.

India has a wide network of central and state training institutes and polytechnics, which offer training courses for women to develop the professional skills required to find highly paid jobs or to be self employed. A National Vocational Training Institute for Women has been set up by the Central Government along with a number of regional institutes.

In the State sector, Vocational Training facilities exclusively for women at craftsmen level are provided through a network of Women Industrial Training Institutes. Training and Capacity building has also been included as an essential ingredient of all social sector programmes as well as schemes to foster entrepreneurship.

Addressing violence against women

The Indian government is striving to provide a safe environment for women to enable them to live their lives and engage in livelihoods with respect and dignity. We strongly condemn violence against women in all forms. India has enacted legislation against domestic violence, child marriage, and prenatal sex selection. More recently a legislation has been tabled in the Parliament for prevention of sexual harassment at the work place.

In several milestone decisions, the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India has established jurisprudence reinforcing women's rights and the provision of a safe and healthy environment at home and work. The National Commission for Women also works as the autonomous watchdog for redressal of matters pertaining to deprivation of women's rights and for recommending amendment of laws to promote gender justice and equality. One of the notable laws introduced in the area of women rights under the Hindu Succession Act has been the granting of equal rights to daughters in the inheritance of ancestral property. Mandatory registration of the wife in all

property owned or acquired by the husband is another progressive step taken by many of the State Governments.

Political empowerment

One of the largest exercises for political empowerment of women was undertaken in India in 1993, when one-third of the seats in local bodies were reserved 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 to wield decision making authority at the very level, which makes significant impact on their lives.

Convergence

India has recently set up a National Mission for Women's Empowerment chaired by the Hon'ble Prime Minister of India. The Mission is responsible for setting goals and monitoring achievements with respect to the selected outcomes though the participating Ministries/Departments will continue to be responsible for implementing their respective schemes/programme.

The National Mission will also ensure similar convergence between activities of State government schemes/programmes, through the State Missions and other institutions such as National and State Commissions for women, civil society organizations and Panchayati Raj institutions.

Mr. Chairman,

Before I conclude, let me join other Member States and all the women civil society organisations in reaffirming our strong commitment to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

Sixteen years ago, the aspirations of the Beijing Declaration may have appeared lofty and distant but together we have moved far along the road. We shall continue to strive for sustainable development, poverty eradication and realization of Millennium Development Goals.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.
